

Chapter 1: Goodbye

4th May 2028

Harry watched his wife pick up her overnight bag. "I'll see you in the morning, Harry."

"Goodbye, Seville." Intending to kiss her, Harry drew her into an embrace which Seville briefly returned before pulling away from Harry.

"Sorry Harry, but I really need to get out of here or I'm going to be late." Seville was a little distracted as she was already thinking about the news conference she was going to be attending in Paris that day.

"Take care." Harry called out as she hurried through the door and out of sight.

"I will." Seville called back as she ran down the staircase. If she'd known that this was to be the last time she'd ever see her husband, Seville knew that she would have treated their goodbye a little differently.

Harry waited for the sound of her apparating away before entering his closet, and removing the box he'd placed in there several days ago. Even though he'd planned to enter the archway and slip beyond the veil, he still felt the need to take with him the things that were most precious to him, as he had a feeling that he wasn't going to his death; at least he hoped he wasn't. After shrinking the large box, he slid it into his pocket before opening the door and walking out of his bedroom.

Harry found his three daughters at the breakfast table discussing Tara's upcoming wedding, and he sat down in a spare chair. "Good morning, girls. Kennedy, I was hoping you'd be here." Harry had seen Robert and his wife Jennifer the day before.

"Hi Dad." Kennedy had agreed to meet her sisters for breakfast before they went shopping for bridal shoes. "Are you alright? You look a little tired."

"Bad transformation." Harry wasn't lying. His last transformation had been extremely painful despite the Wolfsbane he'd taken and, just over a week later, Harry was still feeling the effects of it. Severus had been trying out a new formula in the hope that it would help with the pain and arrest the transformation, but it hadn't worked.

"Why don't you come with us today?" Tara suggested, a little smile playing around her lips; she knew how much Harry hated shopping. "You can help decide on the final choice for my wedding shoes."

Harry hid his distress at knowing that he wouldn't be there to see his daughter marry George and Katie's eldest son, David, in three months' time. "I'd love to but I've something important on today."

"Maybe we could get together tomorrow for lunch? Nic's on a training course all day." Kennedy smiled brightly at her Dad.

Harry knew that wasn't going to be possible. "Let me get back to you. I've got a lot of work on at the moment."

Being the daughter of the head of Auror Division and married to a trainee Auror, Kennedy knew how hard her Dad worked. "Just don't overdo it."

"I won't." Harry couldn't eat and got up from the table. "I need to go but how about a hug before I do?"

Kennedy could see that something was bothering Harry but believing it to be work, she didn't pressure him, and simply slid her arms around his waist. "I love you, Dad."

"I love you too, Kennedy." Harry kissed her on her cheek. "Now how about a hug from you two as well?"

Both girls got up and hugged Harry. Tara looked endearingly at her Dad as she let him go. "Are you sure you don't want to come?"

"You know how I feel about shopping." Harry tweaked Tara's nose. "Now give me a kiss goodbye."

Tara dutifully plonked a kiss on Harry's cheek before Willow did the same. Harry then walked over to the dining room door and looked back at the girls. "Goodbye, girls."

All three girls smiled at Harry and hollered out goodbyes to him before returning their attention to the list that Kennedy had begun to make. Harry gave them one final glance before closing the door behind him, tears starting to form in his eyes. Dashing them away, he took a deep breath and apparated out.

Orion was waiting for him in his office. "Harry, please reconsider."

"No, Orion." Harry knew that his brother would try once again to talk him out of his decision. "I just can't."

"But what about Seville and the children?" Orion tried to get around Harry.

"They'll be well taken care of." Harry performed his trademark action, and ran his hand through his hair. "And they'll get over it."

"Seville might not." Orion knew it was a low blow but he didn't want to lose his brother.

"I doubt Seville will even notice I'm gone." With the busy lives they led, lately Harry had felt as if he and Seville were sometimes little more than ships that passed in the night.

"I'm sure she will." Orion knew that while Harry loved Seville, he wasn't as happy in his marriage as Orion was in his own. "And I'm not going to get over it."

"You will, Orion." Harry checked over his office before turning to face his brother. "You're going to do a great job here."

"You should be doing a great job here, Harry." Orion placed his hands on the top of Harry's arms, and tried one last time to change Harry's mind. "Please, Harry, don't do this. I don't want to lose you when there's no need."

"I have to, Orion." Harry hated the fact that his brother had tears in his eyes. "I think it's best if we say goodbye now."

Realizing that he wasn't going to be able to change Harry's mind, Orion pulled his brother into a tight embrace, trying not to let the threatened tears fall. "I love you and I'll miss you."

"I'll miss you too." Harry gave a small grin and tried to lighten things up. "Provided I don't die of course."

Orion punched Harry in the arm. "I don't believe you will. Nor do you, or you wouldn't be doing this."

"You're right. I don't believe I will." Harry kissed Orion's cheek. "Look after everyone."

"I will." Orion closed his eyes as Harry left the room before locking and warding the room, and giving into the tears that had threatened to fall earlier.

Nic and Peri were waiting for Harry just outside of the Death Chamber. "I almost wish I could come with you." Nic had felt tempted.

"But I've told him this journey is for you alone." Peri, like Harry, believed that he, and he alone, was needed for something important even though none of them knew what. She hugged Harry and kissed his cheek. "Be safe."

Harry took Peri's hand and kissed the back of it. "I love you."

Nic gave Harry a brief hug. "And we love you. Now get in there and get this done." Nic watched as Harry entered the room and closed the door behind him, before he put his arm around his wife and led her away.

As Harry turned around from closing the door he gasped. The room was no longer the dark, stone-stepped pit it had been when he'd entered it moments ago. Now it resembled the white room from his dreams, and as in his dreams, Hermione was standing in front of the white stone steps leading up to the archway. "Hello, Harry."

Next chapter: Harry learns a little about what is going on. Hopefully should be up within a week, if not sooner.

Chapter 2: Fate's Offer

A small nod to Quantum Leap is included here.

Harry walked slowly into the heart of the room. "Hermione, is it really you?"

Unlike in Harry's dreams, Hermione actually stepped towards him. "It is."

"But how?" Harry asked.

"I can answer that question." A voice came from behind Harry.

Harry turned on his heel to face the owner of the voice. "Who are you?"

A tall blond woman in a flowing silvery-white gown answered Harry's question. "I am one of the three sisters of Fate. You may call me Clotho."

"Is it because of you that I'm here?" Harry felt a little in awe of the beautiful, almost ethereal, looking woman.

"It is." Clotho walked over to where Hermione was standing.

Harry couldn't help but stare at the contrast the two women provided; Hermione's dark coloring standing out against the paleness of Clotho's skin. "Then why use Hermione to bring me here?"

Clotho placed a hand on Hermione's shoulder. "Because even though I watch the world, I have no physical connection to it. This is one of the few places in your world where I can appear like this. I therefore needed Hermione to bring you to me."

"Why?" Harry demanded.

"You need to put right what has gone wrong." Clotho informed him.

Harry gave a brief laugh as he remembered a program he used to watch when he was a boy. "Who do you think I am, Sam Beckett?"

Clotho and Hermione both frowned. "Sam Beckett?"

Harry explained. "A muggle television program where a man continually leapt through time trying to put right what once went wrong. The ending was pretty dismal as he never managed to return home."

Clotho was amused by Harry's reference. "Well, Harry. You might say that you're the wizarding version of this Sam Beckett then. Because your alternate moved through time to change things, you now find yourself being asked to do what Sam Beckett did; you need to put things right. And like him, you too will never be able to return home if you agree to do what I ask."

"So this is a request rather than a demand?" After spending so many years as an Auror, Harry was pretty astute at judging people, and he had a feeling that he wouldn't be leaving this room until Clotho got what she wanted.

"I cannot force people to act against their free will. I'm simply a type of guardian." Clotho was actually far more than that but she wasn't going to tell Harry.

"So because my alternate changed the timeline, I'm now obliged to make things right?" Harry wanted to make sure that he'd got things straight.

"Unfortunately your alternate is guilty of making a monumental mistake and someone has to pay the price." Clotho was fed up with standing and several seats appeared. "I think we'll be more comfortable if we're not standing around, so please sit down."

Harry did as he was invited. "But why mess with things now? They don't seem to be that bad to me. Voldemort is dead, the Ministry is somewhat less corrupt and everyone I know seems to be leading a fairly happy life."

"It isn't this world that's in trouble." Clotho watched as disbelief rippled across Harry's face. "I'll let Hermione explain."

Hermione, who'd sat down on the other seat, turned to Harry. "The other Harry was destined to change time but his Hermione wasn't supposed to have survived the sacrifice. When he refused to let her die, he messed up big time, Harry."

"But we already knew that he'd messed up." Harry couldn't see how another world had anything to do with his alternate's tinkering. "How could Potter's mistake have endangered another world?"

"Peri was correct when she said that Harry's spell sent out ripples across time changing things from how they should have been. But Harry, the spell also sent out ripples across the infinite worlds that are out there. The ripples barely scratched the surface of most worlds but in a few of them things aren't what they should be." Hermione knew that Harry would be horrified if he could see what Clotho had shown her could happen if Harry didn't intervene. It had been one of the reasons she'd agreed to help Clotho.

Harry turned to Clotho. "So how did the other Harry affect these worlds?"

"Because of the connection provided by the Propylaeum..." Clotho was cut off mid-sentence.

"What is the Propylaeum?" Harry had never heard of it.

Clotho pointed to the archway behind her. "That is the Propylaeum."

"I thought it was simply an archway that sent people to their deaths." During his time as an Unspeakable, Harry had seen all the relevant data that been collected on it, and none of it had ever mentioned travel to other worlds.

"For some yes, that is simply what it is. But in every world there exists certain artifacts which provide their owner with the ability to use the Propylaeum to travel from one world to another." Clotho explained. "In this world those objects are known as the Deathly Hallows."

Harry still didn't see the connection. "So?"

Clotho continued with her explanation. "When your alternate didn't merge with you when he first arrived, things started to go wrong from that moment. You were destined to face Voldemort and kill him, and not your alternate. Voldemort was meant to die in a duel with you, and was never meant to go through the Propylaeum."

"You're telling me that Peri shouldn't have brought Potter through that day at the Ministry, aren't you?" Harry had eventually come round to his friends' belief that they had done the right thing.

"I am. If you'd faced Voldemort that day, you would have defeated him. Instead, Voldemort went through the Propylaeum." Clotho watched as understanding registered on Harry's face.

Harry paled as he recognized the significance of the word 'through'. "You're telling me that instead of going into the veil and dying, Voldemort went through it and that he's alive in one of these other worlds?"

Hermione nodded. "He was holding the Elder Wand when the other Harry forced him into the veil."

"Oh Merlin." Harry realized that the other Harry had probably unleashed a monster on another world.

"Exactly." Hermione knew from Clotho what would happen if Harry didn't intervene. "Harry, the people in that world need you. If you don't step in and help then Voldemort will eventually achieve the immortality he's been seeking, and he will also discover that he isn't bound into one world alone."

Harry was silent for a while as he processed what he'd found out. "It's been thirty years since Voldemort went through the veil. Why now?"

"Because you weren't ready until now." Hermione placed her chilly hand on Harry's.

Harry frowned. "What do you mean, I wasn't ready?"

Clotho answered him. "At first you simply weren't receptive enough to the dreams. By the time you were, you were tied to your children."

Harry felt a wave of despair as he thought about his children. "I still don't exactly feel good about leaving them."

"I promise you that they will be alright, Harry." Clotho assured him. "All four of them will have long and happy marriages with their chosen partners."

Harry let out a sigh of relief. "Thank you for telling me."

"You haven't mentioned your wife, Harry." Hermione, of course, knew about Seville.

"Do you know everything about my life, Hermione?" Harry was interested to know.

"I do." Hermione responded.

"In that case, you're probably more than aware that while I love Seville, I've never felt the same way about her as I feel about you, even now." Harry directed his next question at Clotho. "Will Seville be alright?"

Clotho knew she was already going to get it in the neck from her sisters for telling Harry about his children, and decided what the heck. "She'll take some time to get over the news of your death but she will eventually recover."

"Will she remarry?" Harry hoped that Seville wouldn't mourn him for too long.

Clotho shook her head. "Harry, you mean as much to Seville as Hermione does to you."

Harry closed his eyes. "Not quite what I wanted to hear."

"I really shouldn't have told you any of this." Clotho admitted. "But I wanted you to know that your children will be happy and won't suffer for what I'm asking you to do."

"But my wife will." Harry ran a hand through his hair, displaying his agitation. "Is there nothing you can do for her?"

"No, but she has her children." Clotho told him. "And she will find comfort through them."

"What happens if I refuse to help?" Even though Harry had thought long and hard about what he'd intended to do, he was now having second thoughts when faced the reality of what he was going to do to his wife.

"You may return to the life you were leading." Clotho nodded towards the door that led out of the Death Chamber. "All you have to do is step through that door."

"And what about Hermione?" Harry knew that he couldn't just leave without making sure that she would be alright.

"I'll move on, Harry. My time here is almost over. That's why I've been moving away from you in the dreams." Hermione took Harry's hand in her own.

Harry looked down at Hermione's hand. "I've never known a ghost to be able to do that. I can feel you but you're cold. So exactly what are you?"

"I'm not exactly a ghost but I'm not living either." Hermione squeezed Harry's hand. "In this room I can feel, I can touch and I can move around but I cannot move outside of it which is why you always saw me in this room. Our love for each other is what allowed you to see me here."

"Why didn't you move on to the other side?" Harry hated the thought of Hermione being trapped for so long in the white room.

"I'd rather not tell you." Hermione wouldn't meet Harry's eyes.

"I want to know, Hermione." Harry lifted Hermione's head with his finger.

Hermione shook her head. "You don't need to know."

Harry gave Clotho a steely glare. "If Hermione won't tell me, then perhaps you will."

"Are you sure you really want to know, Harry?" Clotho knew that her words would bring no joy to Harry.

"I do." Harry sat back and waited expectantly.

Clotho sighed. "Very well. Before we begin I should tell you that I have two sisters; one determines the length of a person's life and the other severs it. The length of Hermione's life had been determined by my sister Lachesis before Hermione was born, and it should have lasted far longer than it did."

Harry frowned. "So the reason Hermione's here is because she shouldn't have died when she did?"

"Not exactly." Clotho continued. "Harry, you should have heeded what Hermione was trying to tell you in your dream."

Harry immediately knew which dream Clotho was referring to. "You're telling me I should have waited instead of waking her up?"

"You should have." As Clotho had expected, her words were bringing Harry nothing but pain.

"But we couldn't find anything." Harry thought back to the conversation he'd had with Severus by the lakeside. "We'd searched everywhere."

"Not everywhere." Hermione spoke again. "Peri had a book that held the answer."

"But why didn't she find tell us about it?" Harry didn't want to believe that Peri would have deliberately prevented him from having a life with Hermione.

"If you'd waited just one day longer, Perenelle was meant to open the book and discover the answer. By then, however, my sister Atropos had severed the tenuous thread that held Hermione to your plane of existence." Clotho was glad that she was no longer mortal and was therefore unable to feel the hurt that Harry obviously was experiencing at that moment. "It is partially your alternate's fault that you made the decision you did. If you hadn't merged with him, the Harry you would have been would have refused to give up and would have waited. It is your alternate's personality that helped mould your decision."

Harry dropped his head into his hands. "No."

"I'm sorry." Clotho was. "Perenelle found the answer just hours after you'd awoken Hermione. She didn't have the heart to tell you."

Harry started as he felt a soft, but cold touch on his shoulder. "Leave me alone."

"Harry." It was Hermione who'd touched him.

Harry looked up at Hermione with tears in his eyes. "It's my fault that you're dead. I selfishly wanted to talk to you once last time. If I'd just waited you'd still be alive."

"Harry, it's too late for regrets." Hermione had had years to face the reality of the truth. "Once you leave here, I will be able to move on."

Harry glared angrily at Clotho. "Why didn't you just let her move on when she died? Why tie her here? I'm sure you could found some other way of letting me know my help was needed."

"Hermione agreed to do this of her own free will, Harry." Clotho hadn't been surprised when the girl had agreed. "Instead of moving on, she preferred to visit you in your dreams rather than never to see you again."

Harry climbed to his feet and pulled an icy-cold Hermione into his arms. "I'm so very sorry, Hermione."

"Harry, I'm no longer important now." Hermione held a hand out towards the veil. "The people who lie beyond the Propylaeum, however, are."

"You'll always be important to me." At that moment Harry wasn't concerned about anyone other than Hermione, and he turned on Clotho. "If she wasn't meant to die when she did, then give Hermione her life back. I'll take her place."

Clotho shook her head. "That isn't your destiny, Harry."

"Fuck my destiny." Harry had had a bellyful of prophecies and so-called destinies. "Hermione doesn't deserve this."

"It isn't a question of who deserves what, Harry. Hermione will move on no matter what happens now." Clotho wasn't frightened of Harry's anger; she knew it was directed at himself.

"Let her return, please." Harry had let go of Hermione, and was now standing directly in front of the woman. "I'd do anything for her."

Clotho placed a soft hand on Harry's cheek. "Harry, I'm sorry but I cannot do that."

"Do you want me to beg?" Harry fell to his knees. "Because I'm begging. Don't make her suffer for my mistake."

Hermione reached out to Harry. "Get up, Harry."

Harry climbed to his feet and took Hermione's hand in his own. "I still love you, Hermione and I'd do anything for you, even give up my life if you could have a chance at life again."

Hermione let a single tear fall. "Harry, I don't wish to live again if I can't be with you."

Harry scowled at Clotho. "I'll help you if you agree to let her live. She can come with me to this other world."

"I can't breathe life into someone who's dead Harry, I'm sorry." Clotho hated moments like this.

"There must be something you can do." Harry refused to believe that someone as powerful as the Fates could do nothing.

Clotho was touched by the couple, and, as she had done on a few occasions throughout history, decided to interfere with her sisters' plans for them. "Because you both have sacrificed so much, I'm going to give you a choice, Harry. You do not wish to be parted from Hermione, do you?"

Harry immediately shook his head. "I do not."

"There is a way for you to be with her." Clotho knew that she would now find out how much Harry really wanted to be with Hermione.

"Then do it." Harry demanded.

"Don't be so hasty." Clotho moved to stand in front of the couple. "You have no idea what I am going to demand in return for granting such a boon."

Harry suddenly found himself worried for his family. "You won't hurt anyone, will you?"

"No, I will not." Clotho smiled. "Harry, if you wish to remain with Hermione then you must give me your soul."

"My what?" Harry wanted to make sure he'd heard Clotho correctly.

"I want your soul, Harry." Clotho repeated her demand.

Harry couldn't quite believe what the sister of fate had asked for. "I thought you were Fate, not the Devil."

"Relax, Harry, I'm only joking." Clotho gave a little smirk. "Sorry, but I couldn't resist teasing you."

Harry let out the breath he was holding. "I don't think that was very funny."

"You don't get much chance to have fun like that when you're me." Clotho winked at Hermione, who was used to Clotho by now, before her face became stern. "Harry, seriously, I cannot bring Hermione back but you can be with her."

Harry understood what Clotho was telling him. "You mean I'd have to die, don't you?"

"I do." Clotho walked away from Harry, and towards the archway.

Hermione started to open her mouth to protest, only for Harry to place a finger on her lips. "What about the other world that apparently needs me?" As much as Harry wanted to be with Hermione, even if it meant giving up his life to be with her, he knew that he could not simply give up on a world that needed him; his conscience wouldn't let him.

Clotho answered his question with a question. "Do you remember when Perenelle told you that your merging could not be undone?"

Harry suddenly knew what Clotho was intimating. "Why is it you can bring him back and not Hermione?"

"Because he's not dead, Harry. His soul is intertwined with your own." Clotho explained, before telling Harry what it was that she truly wanted from him. "The price for being with Hermione is your body Harry."

"I'm not exactly sure whether to take you seriously or not." Harry couldn't tell if Clotho was playing with him.

"I am being sincere this time." Clotho injected a thread of steel into her voice. "If you want to be with Hermione, then your alternate will

take over your body, and your soul will move on with Hermione to the other side.”

Harry hadn't expected to face such a choice. “And will my alternate be the one to put right what has gone wrong?”

“Yes, if he agrees to do so.” Clotho placed her hand on the archway, and the veil became still.

“And if he refuses?” Harry needed to know what repercussions his decision might have.

“Then he will be able to slip into your life and continue it in your stead.” Clotho looked down at Harry. “So Harry, tell me, what do you want to do?”

Next chapter: Harry has a decision to make.

I'd like to say a big thank you to Aealket for his suggestions.

Chapter 3: The Three Sisters

Before Harry could answer Clotho, he was interrupted by a new arrival.

"Messing around with the players again, are we, Clotho?" A raven haired woman stepped out of the archway and faced her sister. "That's very naughty of you."

"Atropos, you know very well I have some leeway in how I deal with matters, as do you." Clotho reminded her sister. "Now, if you'd kindly be quiet, I'm waiting for Harry's answer."

"Not so quick, dear sister." Atropos smiled at Harry. "I too have a proposition for Harry."

Harry felt like a spider in a web as Atropos smiled at him. She reminded him a little of Arabella Zabini; both seductively beautiful and extremely deadly. "Tell me."

"We're willing to let Hermione accompany you but she will be your voice of reason, nothing more." Atropos smirked at her sister.

"What do you mean by voice of reason?" Harry didn't trust the woman.

"She will continue in the same role she's played so far." Atropos sat down on one of the empty chairs. "Like Clotho, I'm not able to give Hermione life again per se, but I can prevent her from crossing over if Lachesis agrees to extend her thread of existence."

Clotho sighed. "You were both listening in, weren't you?"

"Of course." Atropos crossed her legs and leant forward to smile at Harry. "We had a feeling that this was going to be an interesting conversation."

"Come out Lachesis." Clotho leant against the archway. When no-one appeared, she raised her voice. "Right now!"

Lachesis stepped out from the portal, and gave a little wave to Hermione. "Hi Hermie."

"Hi Lach." Hermione smiled brightly at the red-headed woman. "This is Harry."

Harry looked from Hermione to Lachesis. "You two almost sound as if you're friends."

"That's because we are friends, Harry." Lachesis informed him. "As Clotho has already told you, this is one of the few places on this world we can inhabit in this form. With Hermie being destined to spend her time here, it's a little difficult to spend thirty years passing through and not form some sort of friendship."

Harry shook his head. "Only you would make friends with one of the Fates, Hermione."

Hermione proved that she was still Hermione. "Do you have any idea how much knowledge Lach possesses, Harry?"

Harry shook his head. "You're still sucking up knowledge even now!"

Hermione shrugged. "There's not a lot else to do when you're dead and stuck in this room, Harry."

Harry sobered up at the reminder, before smiling at the newcomer. "Do you have something to bring to the table?"

"Of course." Lachesis told him. "I can offer something to both of you."

"And...?" Harry waited for her response.

"If you agree to deal with Voldemort, I'm willing to extend your life if you survive." Lachesis offered.

"That would be tempting if you hadn't added the proviso." Harry wasn't impressed by the offer so far. "But my main interest here is Hermione."

"I'm willing to extend to Hermie's thread." Lachesis knew that Harry would be tempted by her proposal. "If I don't do it, then as Atropos has already intimated, Hermie would move on to the next realm of existence."

"I don't want that; not unless I can be with her." Harry couldn't face losing Hermione now that he'd found her again.

"If we allow Hermione to accompany you, there will, of course, be a price." Atropos stood back up. "We're not exactly going to ask for your body as Clotho did, but we are going to demand that you share it."

"You want to unmerge my soul?" Harry wasn't too keen on having the other Harry back.

"We do." Atropos gave a little playful smile. "I have to be honest. I prefer the other Harry to you."

"Thank you so much. It's nice to be appreciated." Harry couldn't help but let sarcasm color his response.

"What can I say? He livens things up." Atropos liked to live dangerously, or at least, she had done when she was a mortal. "He's a bit of a bad boy and I like that."

"Atropos." Clotho sighed. "You've been immortal for thousands of years, and you're still running after the worst kind of men. You're the one who got our family into trouble, and the reason why we're stuck here doing this."

"I'm never going to change, Clotho, so live with it." Atropos didn't fill Harry in on what she'd done.

Harry had a feeling he didn't want to ask what Atropos had done, but he knew that his counterpart wouldn't have hesitated to do so. "So what exactly will happen to Hermione?"

Annoyed with Clotho's castigation of her, Atropos decided to up the offer in relation to Hermione. "Agree to my demands, and she'll

accompany you but only in your dreams, or..." At this point she turned to Clotho. "Perhaps you'd like to tell him what you failed to earlier."

Clotho scowled at her sister as she was forced to reveal what she'd hidden from both Harry and Hermione. "Hermione cannot exist in solid form outside of this room but in the world you're travelling to, she can. In that world there are no such things as ghosts. She wouldn't be living but she would be able to interact with the world around her. And like you, she'd feel pain, pleasure, joy, sadness; you get the picture."

Harry was beginning to actively dislike Clotho. "You've just berated your sister for her actions but at least she's being honest."

Clotho gave a tight smile. "Don't be fooled by Atropos. She's easily the nastiest of the three of us."

"She's right, which is why I like the other Harry." Atropos gave a tiny shiver. "I get goosebumps just thinking about him."

Harry felt a little queasy at Atropos' interest in his alternate self. "Aren't you supposed to be above that?"

"I may be immortal, Harry, but that doesn't mean I don't have desires like any other woman." Atropos winked at Harry. "It's almost a shame that your body is a little old for my tastes."

Harry felt a shudder of disgust run down his spine. "Something for which I can say that I'm truly thankful."

Atropos merely laughed. "You're breaking my heart, Harry but perhaps your alternate might think differently."

"Atropos, for goodness sake." Clotho snapped at her sister. "We've got some important decisions to make." She turned to Harry. "If you'll excuse us for a moment."

Harry watched as the three sisters vanished, before reappearing moments later. "So what have you decided for me?"

“Nothing has been decided for you. It’s up to you to make the final decision.” Clotho had obviously elected herself head spokesperson.

“And my options are?” Harry wanted to make sure he knew exactly what was on offer before he made a final decision.

Clotho laid out the first option. “You can leave and simply carry on with your life. Hermione will pass over and that will be that.”

“Not going to happen.” Harry knew that he couldn’t just walk away.

Clotho had expected Harry to reject the option. “Secondly, your soul can pass over with Hermione and your alternate will take over your body. We’ll then ask him if he’s willing to carry out our request. If he’s not, then he gets to live out the rest of your life in this world.”

“After thinking it over, that’s not exactly appealing to me either.” Harry didn’t trust the other Harry not to simply refuse the three women, and to step into Harry’s shoes instead. While he was amenable to the idea of moving on with Hermione, he couldn’t bear the thought of the other Harry living with Seville and his children.

“Your third choice is to go through the Propylaeum as you are with your soul unmerged, and Hermione will pass on.” Clotho knew that Harry was going to refuse this option as well.

“I don’t think so.” Harry glanced at Hermione who, knowing that this was now Harry’s decision alone, had remained quiet ever since Atropos had made her appearance.

“So your final option is to allow us to release the other Harry as Atropos has demanded. In return, Hermione may accompany you in solid form rather than as a mere entity in your dreams but her time in the other world will be finite.” Clotho hadn’t finished speaking when Harry interrupted her.

“What do you term as finite?” Harry wasn’t going to say yes, and then find that Hermione passed on after a few days.

"It's going to be longer than you'll need but not as long as you would like." Atropos was aware that her answer wouldn't satisfy Harry.

She was right. "That doesn't exactly answer my question."

Clothos shrugged. "That's all you're getting, Harry. As I said before Atropos so rudely interrupted us, it's time to decide. So what's it to be Harry?"

Harry knew he couldn't make the decision alone. "Hermione, I haven't asked you what you want in all of this."

"I want to be with you." Hermione answered simply. "Be it in the next realm or for a short time in another world."

Harry had only one reservation. "But I'm so much older now."

Hermione shrugged. "My body may look younger but I've existed for as long as you have."

At Hermione's words, Harry knew what his decision was going to be. "I can't let people suffer for what my alternate has done. Will you accompany me?"

"I wouldn't want to be anywhere else." Hermione couldn't believe that after so long she was finally going to get a chance to be with Harry.

Harry took Hermione's hand and squeezed it, before letting it go and turning to Clotho. "You knew you were going to get what you wanted when I first entered this room, didn't you?"

"I did." Clotho always got her way; everyone had their price. "But you'd already guessed that hadn't you?"

"Yes." Harry braced himself. "Do whatever you must." He then let out a small cry as Hermione vanished. "Where is she?"

"She's waiting for you in the other world. As you may have gathered, we have the power to travel between worlds without the aids mere

mortals require.” Clotho informed him. “Let’s call Hermione’s removal from here insurance.”

Lachesis frowned at her sister. “He’s already said that he’d help.”

“I can't have him changing his mind at the last second; you know what's at stake.” Clotho reminded her sister.

Harry suddenly realized that there was more going on than he'd first thought. “You’re frightened.”

“I’m scared of nothing.” Clotho snapped.

“Harry...” Lachesis began to speak, only for Clotho to interrupt her.

“I forbid you to tell him.” Clotho didn’t want Harry finding out exactly how important he really was.

“Forbid me all you want to. I didn't agree not to tell him of the consequences of his refusal.” Lachesis was a little fed up with her younger sister constantly trying to control her. “Harry, if Voldemort achieves immortality in the world we're sending you to, not only will every mortal world be in danger but the immortal world will be as well. This would, as you can probably figure out, affect the three of us.”

Atropos grinned at Clotho. “I told you she’d tell him.” She then looked knowingly at Harry. “But you weren’t going to say no to us, anyway, were you Harry?”

“You know I wasn’t.” Harry didn’t like the feeling that he was exactly what Atropos had described him as, a player, and that these three women were the directors choreographing his every move. “So what would have happened if I'd changed my mind at the last second?”

Clotho’s face lost its luminosity and became almost frightening. “I'd have condemned Hermione to a life of misery instead of allowing her to move on. She's not mortal anymore and there are plenty of worlds out there I could send her to where she wouldn't find life quite as pleasant as it has been here. The one you're going to isn't exactly sweetness and light either.”

Lachesis held up her hand. "You know very well that I wouldn't let you do that, Clotho." She turned to Harry. "The price for Hermie's continued existence in this realm is your agreement to the demerger, Harry. I cannot extend her thread without it. I'm sorry."

Of the three sisters, Harry trusted only Lachesis. "Very well. I'm ready then."

"Close your eyes." Lachesis gently touched Harry's brow. "It is done."

Harry opened his eyes and frowned. "I can't recall most of the other Harry's memories." Harry knew that he'd known about them but he could only recall those he'd actually seen in a pensieve.

"That's because we've given them back to him." Lachesis turned to her sisters. "You two have work to do, so go get it done. I'll deal with Harry."

Harry watched as the two sisters simply vanished without a sound. "Clotho isn't as pleasant as she first appears to be, is she?"

"No, she's not." Lachesis decided to fill Harry in a little on why. "When we were mortal she was betrayed in the worst possible way."

Harry had a fairly good idea of how. "I take it this has something to do with Atropos."

"You are most astute." Lachesis looked down at her hands before looking back up at Harry. "But it is not my story to tell."

"Surely Clotho must have gotten over it by now." Harry couldn't believe that Clotho was still pissed at her sister after thousands of years.

"Unfortunately, despite the passage of time, she hasn't." Lachesis sighed. "After it happened and we became immortal, Clotho vowed that if she couldn't be happy in life, then no-one else who crossed her path would be either. But she is a romantic at heart, which is why she

offered you the chance to be with Hermie in death. However, when she refused to offer you the same in life, Atropos and I overruled her."

"Clotho's the reason Hermione knows all about my life, isn't she?" Harry had a feeling that Clotho had done it out of spite.

"She is." Lachesis confirmed. "Harry, while Hermione was upset at first, she also understood. I'm sorry but I could do little for her except listen when she needed a friend."

Harry was grateful for everything Lachesis had appeared to have done. "Thank you for helping us."

"Someone had to." Lachesis liked Harry. "Harry, I'd like to talk more but Hermie is out there on her own."

Harry remembered Clotho's comment about the world he was supposed to be travelling to. "Can you tell me anything about where I'm going to?"

Lachesis shook her head. "I can't tell you much. It was part of the bargain I made with my sisters in order to let Hermie retain her form but I can give you three pieces of advice. The world you are travelling to isn't how it should be; the impossible is possible there. Please be careful and don't necessarily trust who you would trust here. And finally, there is one there who can help you but it is up to you to seek that person out."

"Who is it?" Harry was both intrigued and dismayed at Lachesis' words.

"I'm afraid I cannot tell you." Lachesis then smiled. "Now I have a gift for you."

"Should I be scared?" Harry asked, smiling back at his benefactor.

"No." Lachesis gestured for Harry to step closer. "I won't hurt you. Close your eyes and relax."

Harry did exactly that, jumping a little as he felt Lachesis' lips briefly cover his own before the pressure was gone. "What did you do?"

"You'll find out soon enough. It is time." Lachesis then kissed Harry's forehead.

At the touch of Lachesis' lips on his forehead, Harry found himself hurtling through a dark void before being unceremoniously spat out on the other side.

As he rolled over and got to his feet, he gasped in surprise and unholstered his wand. "What the hell?"

Next chapter: We find out what surprised Harry; We also see a little of the world that Harry has travelled to.

Chapter 4: Acclimation

"Harry James Potter, put that wand down immediately." Bellatrix Lestrange scowled at Harry. "You, young man, are coming with me."

As his mind processed the 'young man' comment, Harry assessed the eight grey suited men who flanked Bellatrix and knew that he couldn't take on all nine at once without the risk of injury; he therefore lowered his wand. "Okay."

Bellatrix, who too was dressed in a severe grey suit of tight fitting pants and a matching long-sleeved jacket, led the way out of the Death Chamber and into the circular room with the twelve doors. After walking a short distance, she pushed open one of the doors, and Harry followed her through it into a well lit corridor. It was at that moment he caught sight of his reflection in one of the glass picture frames that lined the corridor and, in shock, he ground to halt. "Oh Merlin."

Bellatrix scowled and turned back to face Harry. "Oh Merlin indeed. This time Sirius isn't going to be so forgiving, Harry. Now move it."

As he was led to a door he was very familiar with, having been the owner of the office beyond it until he'd ceded his position to Orion, Harry pondered the possibility of whether Bellatrix was an Auror in this world or whether this was a new uniform for Death Eaters. Either way, he'd never seen a uniform like it before.

Bellatrix knocked on the door and entered when bidden to. "Sir, we found the culprit behind the alarms going off. He was lying at the base of the archway when we found him."

Sirius got to his feet and walked around the desk to find himself face to face with his godson. "Harry, what the bloody hell were you playing at?"

Harry simply shrugged his shoulders. "I was just exploring."

"You know very well that the corridor beyond this room is off limits to you. How did you get past the guard?" Sirius leant back against the desk.

"Not everyone pays attention as reliably as they should." Harry acted as one of his daughters would have when caught out, and scuffed the floor with the toe of his boot.

"Bella, that will be all." Sirius waited for Bella to leave before turning back to Harry and holding out his hand. "The invisibility cloak please."

"I don't have it." Harry lied.

Sirius narrowed his eyes. "I'd better find out that that's true, Harry, otherwise I'm going to ask your father to take it away from you permanently."

Harry's heart leapt at the thought of seeing Remus. "I understand."

Sirius decided to give Harry the benefit of the doubt. "I'm not trying to pick on you, but James has enough to deal with without having to put up with you and your shenanigans."

"Are you going to tell him?" Harry was disappointed that Sirius didn't mean Remus, and he certainly had no wish to meet what would probably be a very angry James Potter.

"Not this time." Sirius felt embarrassed that a sixteen year old had gotten past his supposedly unbeatable Aurors. "But if this happens again, I will." He looked assessingly at Harry. "Before I let you go, I want to know why you did it."

"A bet." It was the first thing Harry thought of.

Sirius grinned as he realized that it was just a prank probably instigated by one of Harry's schoolmates, and something he would have done if he could have when he was Harry's age. "In that case, it's one bet I'm afraid you're going to be paying out on." He watched Harry's face fall and suddenly realized something. "Where are your glasses?"

"I'm trying out some contact lens." Harry had actually had his eyesight fixed by a simple potion that Severus had invented some fifteen years previously.

"I think I prefer you in glasses." Sirius observed. "Anyway I've got work to do. You know where the exit is. Make sure you use it."

"Yes, Sir." Harry gave Sirius a small grin and pulled open the door.

A few minutes later Harry found himself standing in Diagon Alley. His first concern was finding Hermione, as it was obvious that she hadn't arrived in this world via the portal and he had no problem in believing that Clothos could have deposited her anywhere.

Harry used his olfactory senses to try and pick up on Hermione, but in the crowded streets of Diagon Alley it was almost nigh on impossible to distinguish a smell that was belonged to her. Harry had just reached Quality Quidditch Supplies when someone he'd hoped never to interact with while he obviously looked like Harry Potter, stopped directly in front of him. "Harry, why aren't you at home with your mother?"

"She said I could come to Diagon Alley as long as I was back before it got dark." Harry was surprised at how much he actually looked like James Potter.

"I thought you were supposed to be grounded." James stood with his arms folded.

"I am but I needed a few things for school so Mum said I could visit Diagon Alley." Harry wondered how many lies he was going to have to come up with.

"Very well, but once you've gotten them, please return directly to Snape Manor." James ordered. "I'll see you on Saturday."

"Yes, Sir." Harry wasn't quite sure how to address James and opted for a more formal form of address.

It seemed to do the trick. "Give your sister my love." With that James walked off.

Harry wondered who his sister was and why Lily would be at Snape Manor; the only reason he could think of was that she was married to Severus. Suddenly Harry picked up the scent he was looking for. Glancing in the direction it was coming from he was shocked to see Hermione heading towards him with a very familiar face.

Harry walked over to the couple. "Jamie?"

"No, I'm the Ghost of Christmas Past." Jamie said sarcastically.

"Excuse me." Harry then leant over and whispered in Hermione's ear. "I know I look younger but it's me, Harry Lupin."

Hermione was relieved to have found Harry. "Harry, this isn't the Jamie Potter of this world, if he exists..." Anything else Hermione was intending to say was cut off.

Harry's face darkened at Hermione's words. "Those bitches. They bring that shit back and yet they refused to do the same for you."

Hermione hushed Harry up. "Not here, Harry. Come with us."

Harry followed Hermione and Jamie to the Leaky Cauldron where she led Harry upstairs and into a room with three beds in it. "We've been here for hours. Where were you and why do you look different?"

"I came through the veil, and I think that my new look is a gift from Lachesis." Harry knew that was the only explanation for his rejuvenated look. Harry scowled at Jamie before addressing Hermione again. "So why did they bring that git back and not you?"

"Because I'm not Jamie Potter, Lupin." The Jamie look-a-like sat down on a bed. "It's me, Harry Potter."

Now Harry knew where the memories and the other Harry's soul had ended up. "So they put your soul in Jamie's body; but how and why?"

Hermione explained. "Atropos offered Harry here a choice. His soul could either move on or he could accept Jamie's body and join us in trying to deal with Voldemort."

"But if Clothos could give Potter a body and breathe life into it, then why not you?" Harry struggled to contain his anger at the three sisters.

"Because my soul had already passed on from the realm of the living. This Harry's hadn't; he just didn't have a body." Hermione explained. "As you know, unlike the Snapes, the Potters don't cremate their loved ones; they place them in glass caskets which keeps the bodies preserved. The Fates simply stole Jamie's body for Harry's use."

Harry Potter looked at his reflection in the mirror. "They could have picked someone else; the thought of looking like this bastard for the rest of my life isn't exactly appealing."

Harry was still reeling at what the three sisters had done. "But it's been thirty years. We couldn't keep you in stasis any longer than three years."

"That's because the stasis spell wasn't meant to be used on living tissue, Harry." Hermione looked over to where Harry Potter was pulling faces at himself in the mirror. "The stasis spell on the glass caskets degrades slowly over hundreds of years; it hasn't got to try and sustain a living being."

Harry sank onto the other bed. "So we've obviously got a bigger problem than I believed moments ago."

Hermione frowned. "What do you mean?"

Harry told the pair of them what Lachesis had told him. "If they've given Potter here his own body, then they're even more worried than Lachesis let on. We've now got three potential Harry Potters running around which increases the odds of defeating Voldemort exponentially. And I know Harry Potter exists here because I've already been mistaken for him by both Sirius Black and James Potter."

"Tell me what happened when you came through to this world." Hermione demanded.

Harry quickly gave the two of them a rundown on what had happened since he'd arrived. "I can't walk around looking like this. I'm going to get caught out eventually."

"Harry, are you still a werewolf?" Hermione asked nervously.

Harry nodded. "My senses are still acute, so I'd guess yes. Why?"

"Because we found out the date." Harry Potter handed over a newspaper. "Full moon is in two days."

Harry knew of plenty of places he could transform so he wasn't concerned by that. It was the date itself that caught his attention. "20th August 2002. How can we have travelled backwards?"

"I've done it before." Harry Potter wasn't exactly perturbed by the time travelling aspect. "It may be that time runs slower here; I don't really know."

"I wonder how long it's been since Voldemort arrived." Harry frowned.

"Harry, did you even look at the headline?" Hermione nudged the paper again.

Harry picked up the paper once more and scanned the headline.

"Remus Lupin Becomes Youngest Head of Watchers' Council in a Century."

Yesterday Remus Lupin was unanimously voted in as the latest in a long line of watchers to take over the exalted position of President of the Watchers' Council. Lupin, whose alma mater is Hogwarts, has a tough job ahead of him trying to rebuild what was destroyed several months ago. He refused to make any comment except that he would do his best to reclaim what has been lost."

Harry found his mouth hanging open as he looked at the picture of Remus, who obviously didn't want the limelight and was trying to make his way out of the picture. "But the Watchers' Council is something from a television program."

"Back home maybe, but here it's very real." Hermione took the paper from an unprotesting Harry. "You said that Lachesis said that the impossible could be possible here."

"I didn't expect something like that." Harry was shocked.

"Neither did I." Harry Potter admitted. "I've seen the program in my world so I was able to explain it to Hermione."

"At least we know some of the people who exist here, and that things are somewhat different." Hermione wasn't quite sure of what to do next. "So what now?"

Harry thought for a moment and pulled out the box he'd shrunk in reality what was only hours ago but felt like weeks earlier. "Let me just enlarge this."

Hermione and Harry Potter watched interestedly as Harry opened the box and pulled out two rings. "These rings will provide a permanent glamour for you. You need to decide how you want to look, adopt the glamour and slide the ring on. Once you touch it twice the ring will lock that glamour in. Only you can see or remove the ring once it's on, and only you can remove the glamour."

"This is like the ring Dae said he had, isn't it?" Hermione remembered Dae touching his hand before revealing to her what he really looked like.

Harry nodded. "It is. I already have one." Harry demonstrated, and an older man appeared in his stead. "I would have used it at the Ministry but decided it was easier to go along with everyone thinking I was the Harry Potter of this world."

"I think you might want to revisit your look Harry." Harry Potter suggested. "You look at least forty with the glamour on."

Harry knew his counterpart was right. "I'm not going to do much except to change my eye color to blue and lengthen my hair slightly. And maybe change my face shape a little."

Hermione watched as Harry touched his hand and the glamour vanished before being replaced with a Harry that she was a little more familiar with. "You still sort of look like you but you certainly don't look like the Harry Lupin I'm familiar with."

Harry Potter looked in the mirror and also lengthened his hair before making his eyes a vivid chartreuse color. He then made his chin slightly more angular and darkened his hair until it was almost black. "What do you think?"

"No-one's going to mistake you for either Harry or Jamie Potter now." Hermione quite liked the new look. "It suits you."

"How about you, Hermione?" Harry turned to Hermione.

"Watch." Hermione looked in the mirror and smiled as her hair receded to a short sleek bob with soft auburn highlights running through it; her eyes became a pale violet color and her lips filled out slightly. A pair of small rectangular glasses completed the look.

Harry Potter whistled. "Very sexy, Hermione."

Hermione scowled at him. "It's supposed to be studious."

Harry grinned at her. "It's that as well."

Hermione looked in her appearance before bringing up another problem. "What about our names?"

"I thought about using Venant but Voldemort would recognize it." Harry had already been thinking about the name issue. "Do either of you have any ideas?"

Hermione had. "How about my brother's name?"

"Dominic or Sebastian?" Harry queried.

"Sebastian." Hermione told him. "It's an old pureblood name that died out years ago in a branch of the Snape family. We could say that our parents' ancestors moved to Australia or Canada and we've grown up there."

"What about our accents?" Harry Potter didn't want a foreign accent.

"I didn't think of that." Hermione frowned.

Harry had a way around that. "I know the US pretty well because of Auri and Dae living there for a while. Before they moved back to England, their eldest, Helena, attended an academy which was run by British based witches and wizards. It was actually set up for expats who wanted to keep their British identity, and everyone who taught there was British. I need to find out if it exists here. If it does, we can say that we attended it."

Harry Potter was relieved. "That's good but we need to do something about our first names. We both can't be called Harry."

Harry was rather fond of his name and didn't really want to be called anything else. "So what do you suggest?"

Harry had already thought of something. "I thought we could pose as brothers and Hermione could be your wife. I take it you prefer the name Harry?" At Harry Potter's question, Harry nodded. "In that case, why don't you go with something like Harrison Sebastian; Harry for short."

"What about you?" Harry asked. "I hardly think it's fair that I simply appropriate the name Harry."

Harry Potter shrugged. "Let's go with something like Henry James. You can call me H.J. for short. I can live with that."

Harry liked H.J.'s suggestion. "It's fine with me. Hermione, are you going to stick with your name?"

Hermione shook her head. "I'm going to shorten it to Mione."

H.J.'s stomach growled. "I don't know about you but it's been a long time since this body ate and I'm hungry."

"I've never gotten the chance to tell you how much you disgust me." Harry scowled at his new brother. "But that comment is beyond disgusting."

"But true." H.J. wasn't bothered by Harry's disdain. "Let's go."

The three of them made their way downstairs, and ordered a meal. They'd almost finished their food before Harry gave the room more than a perfunctory glance. "I'm finding it hard to believe I'm somewhere else. It doesn't really look any different."

"It certain doesn't feel any different either." Hermione nudged Harry as a pair of familiar faces came into the room. "Prewett."

Harry watched Ginny and Ron Prewett sit down together. "Not exactly my favorite people."

"Nor mine." Hermione admitted. "Why don't we finish this up and go back upstairs? We really need to figure out what we're going to do."

H.J. yawned. "For tonight I'm just going to get some sleep."

"I'd have thought you'd want to be out and about." Harry knew he would have wanted to do that if he'd been released from what effectively was a prison.

"I feel exhausted, Harry. Some of us have been here for almost a day." H.J. got up. "Come on; we could all probably do with the sleep more than you realize."

Harry and Hermione followed H.J. up the stairs. Twenty minutes later all three of them were sound asleep.

One Week Later

Harry found himself sitting opposite the Remus Lupin of this world. "So, as you can see, I've worked in several libraries throughout the US but nothing as prestigious as the Watchers' Council Library."

Remus scanned the paperwork that Harry had supplied him with. The young man in front of him was by far and away the most academically qualified, even if he hadn't got as much actual job experience as the other candidates. "You attended the Barstow Academy?"

Harry nodded. "My parents insisted my brother and I attend."

"And you've worked at the Institute for Magical Research for two years?" Remus knew that Harry was a little light on work experience but there was something compelling about the young man.

"Yes. I probably would have been there still but I wished to expand my horizons and move to the country my forefathers came from." Harry hoped that Remus was buying his story.

"You have a very definite British accent, Mr. Sebastian." Remus had been surprised at how British someone who'd lived all their lives in the US had sounded.

"My parents insisted I attend the Barstow Academy primarily because it was British run. All of our servants were British, and the accent was encouraged." Harry was glad of his years working as an Auror and an Unspeakable; it made lying very easy for him.

"You're not the most experienced applicant I've had for the position, Mr. Sebastian. What makes you think that you could do a better job than anyone else?" Remus sat back and waited for Harry's answer.

"I don't know that I can do a better job than anyone else, Mr. Lupin." Harry decided that honesty might be the best way to go. "But I do know that opportunities like this come but once in a lifetime and I'm willing to do whatever it takes to get the job."

Remus knew that he had little else to ask Harry. "Is there anything else that I haven't covered that you'd like to ask?"

Harry thought of something Remus hadn't covered. "The most obvious question is why did the last candidate leave?"

"Terrie is due to give birth any day now, and she did us a favor by staying as long as she did." Remus was sorry to see her go. "Is there anything else you think I should know before I make a final decision?"

Harry had originally intended to tell Remus that he was a werewolf, but on entering the office he'd determined that the Remus of this world didn't share his affliction, and, having discovered how werewolves were viewed in this world, decided that he needed to keep his status as a werewolf hidden. Werewolves, as they had been in his own world, were feared and despised and many had simply been exterminated until a law was passed allowing them to live but only as tagged individuals. Harry had no wish to join their ranks. "No, except to reiterate my statement about being willing to do whatever it takes."

Remus decided that he liked the earnest young man. "In that case, thank you for attending, Mr. Sebastian. I'll let you know of my decision within the next few days."

Dismissed, Harry stood up and shook hands with Remus. "Thank you for considering me."

"My secretary will show you out." Remus pressed a button and a blond, middle-aged woman entered the room. "Louisa, please show Mr. Sebastian out."

Harry followed the secretary out before exiting onto Bond Street in London. Making his way to the nearest floo point, Harry paid the requisite fee before flooing to the small house the three of them had managed to rent for a few weeks with some of the money Harry had thankfully brought with him. Hermione and H.J. had both found small amounts of money in their pockets when they'd arrived; something they suspected Lachesis had provided.

Hermione glanced up as Harry flooed in. "So, how did it go?"

Harry could see she was excited. "Calm down. I won't know for a few days. Remus said that there were other applicants far more qualified than myself."

H.J. put down the mug of tea he was drinking from. "I told you; you should have upped your qualifications. We might not get an opportunity like this again. I mean what are the chances of two almost perfect positions being available like this?"

"I'm aware of how lucky we are. But it was hard enough for me to obtain these papers in a world I know nothing about; I didn't want to push it any further." Harry picked up the teapot and poured himself a cup of tea. "How did your interview at Hogwarts go?"

H.J. grinned. "I got the assistant flying position."

"Don't tell me; you impressed them with your charm." Harry responded wryly.

"No, I impressed them with my Wronski Feint; something they've never seen in this world." H.J. grinned a little maliciously. "The head of the Slytherin quidditch team ended up plowing head first into the ground. It was a joy to watch."

"I'll bet it was." Harry wasn't exactly sure that H.J. was totally suited to a teaching position but he'd been even less suited to the spot at the Watchers Library that Harry had wanted himself.

"Either way, I'm in." H.J. put his feet up on the table. "And Mione Dominic has been accepted for her seventh year at Hogwarts."

The three of them had decided that one of them needed to be among the students and Hermione had been 'volunteered'. It had meant, however, that Hermione now couldn't masquerade as Harry's wife. She'd therefore decided to adopt her other brother's name as her surname. "I can't believe I'm going to Hogwarts."

Harry was going to miss her. "I'd hoped to spend more time with you."

"We agreed that this would be for the best." Hermione touched his hand. "I can do more by infiltrating the students, and H.J. can question the teachers. If you get the librarian's position you can ascertain whether Voldemort has made any inroads via the Council."

"I know; I was just hoping for more time together before something like this happened." Looking down at where Hermione's hand was covering his own, Harry still couldn't get over how different Hermione's hand felt; it was no longer the icy appendage it had been in the white room. Now, while it wasn't exactly warm, it was still a lot warmer than it had been. "This still feels strange. I know you're not alive but when I touch you, it's easy to forget that."

"Tell me about it." Hermione herself was still getting used to being able to interact outside of the white room. "I'm just glad I've got the glamour to simulate the fact that I'm breathing. I'd hate to be thought of as a vampire."

The three of them had found out that vampires did exist in this world but they weren't the same as the ones they'd been aware of in their own worlds. Two classes of vampires existed; soulless killers who haunted the nights seeking out prey to sustain their life spans, and a breed that had adapted to live in the daylight. Hermione had found out that these vampires were by law allowed to interact within the wizarding world but that they were treated as second class citizens; shunned by most and hated by others.

Harry sat down on the small cream colored sofa that graced their sitting room. "So as long as I get this job, then we're all settled."

"It looks that way." H.J. decided to give the couple some time alone. "I'm going over to the Prophet; I'll look through some more back issues to see if I can find anything on Voldemort. If those sisters hadn't told me he was here, I'd be hard pressed to believe it."

"I'll see you later." Harry was glad that despite his demeanor, H.J. did have some tact.

Hermione sat down next to Harry, and curled up against his arm. "Why do you think we can't locate Voldemort?"

"I don't know." Harry slipped his arm around Hermione's shoulders and pulled her closer to him. "It's almost as if he's gone to ground."

"Which worries me more than if he was being blatant about what he's after." Hermione wrapped her arm around Harry's waist and laid her head on his chest. "Harry, do you regret giving everything up to do this?"

"Yes and no." Harry sighed. "I miss my children so much it's almost painful."

Hermione asked the one question she'd avoided asking since they'd first arrived. "Do you miss Seville?"

Harry closed his eyes. He didn't want to hurt Hermione but he didn't want to lie either. "I do. It's hard to be married to someone for so long and then to completely cut them out of your life." Harry pulled away from Hermione so that he could see her face. "But Seville also had to live with the fact that I still loved you even when I was married to her."

"Harry, I've something to confess." Hermione began to chew her bottom lip. "When I said I knew all about your life, I wasn't exactly telling the truth. I mean I know who you married; when your children were born and things like that but I don't know every intimate detail."

Harry had believed that Hermione had been aware of everything. "Exactly how much did Clothos reveal to you?"

"Enough to hurt me." Hermione admitted. "But she never went into minute detail of what you were doing."

"I'm glad of that." Harry had to admit to feeling relieved that Hermione hadn't been all knowing.

"Harry, why haven't you tried to sleep with me?" Hermione asked the other question she'd wanted to know the answer to since they'd arrived.

"Hermione, I really do want to be with you but as I said a few days ago, I think we need to take things slowly. It would have been different if I'd chosen to move over with you but this is almost as if we're back where we started when we first admitted we liked each other." Harry grinned, trying to take the edge off his words. "Except that I'm a forty-eight year in a sixteen year old's body."

Hermione knew what Harry meant. "Yet your glamour makes you look like a twenty-two year old."

"I have a part to play, Hermione, as do you." Harry pushed Hermione's hair away from where it had flopped in front of her eyes. "I like your hair like this."

"So do I." Hermione had hoped that Harry would kiss her and was disappointed when he didn't. She changed the topic to something less personal. "I've got to go shopping tomorrow; I still need a wand, clothing and text books."

"I'll come with you." Harry dropped his hand and pulled Hermione close to him again. "But right now, I just want to sit back and relax."

Hogwarts

Minerva looked up from her desk as the fireplace flared to life. "Remus, Rupert. To what do I owe this pleasure?"

"Giles is here to check on the progress of the building of the Academy, and I'm here to discuss the list of applicants for the librarian's position." Remus put down the pile of papers he was holding before turning to address his friend and colleague. "Giles, I'll meet you at the site in about twenty minutes."

"Minerva." Rupert Giles cleaned his glasses of the soot they'd accumulated before turning to Remus. "Thanks for the ride." He then headed out of the door.

Minerva smiled. "He still doesn't like flooing, does he?"

“Not particularly but he said that he prefers it to apparating.” Remus had only apparated Giles once and that had been enough for the man. “Anyway, down to business. I’ve screened the applicants for the librarian’s position.”

“Do they know they’ll be sharing their time between Hogwarts and the Council?” Minerva had looked over the candidates several times.

Remus shook his head. “I figured I’d tell them when they’d got the position, and I wanted to discuss it with you first.” Remus knew that if he’d advertised the fact he would have been inundated by far more applicants than he had time to sift through.

“I can tell you’ve got someone in mind.” Minerva, who hadn’t seen the candidates herself, also had a few preferences. “After looking at the list, I think that three stand out; Melanie Bradshaw, Harrison Sebastian and my personal favorite, Deanna Meldrew.”

“I’ve narrowed it down to Melanie and Harrison. Deanna’s a nice girl but she hasn’t got the drive I’m looking for.” Remus didn’t need to look back over the final two contenders’ details; he had a photographic memory. “Melanie is highly qualified but I’m not quite sure she’s the right person for this position. If it had been simply a job at the Council, then I would have chosen her.”

“But she’s a Hogwarts alumna.” Minerva pointed out.

“I know Harrison Sebastian didn’t attend Hogwarts but there’s something more approachable about him.” Remus had really liked the young man. “He’s also fifteen years younger than Melanie, and I think he’ll connect better with the students.”

Minerva tapped the desk with her quill. “I’ve actually just taken on Harrison’s brother, Henry, as the assistant flying coach.”

“How was he?” Even though Remus had never been a keen flyer, he’d always enjoyed watching others.

"He's far better than Mara Hooch ever was." Minerva hadn't seen anyone fly that fluidly in a long time. "But I'll kill you if you tell her."

Remus grinned. "You know me better than that." He stood up. "I've got to get over to the site." Remus made his decision there and then. "So would you like to interview Harrison before I offer him the job?"

"No. I'll trust you on this one." Minerva had more than enough to do with the school term about to start again. "Just tell Mr. Sebastian I expect to see him two days before school starts so that he can settle in."

Next Chapter: The trio move into Hogwarts.

Chapter 5: A Person to Trust?

August 30th 2002

Mione threw the paper down onto the desk. "This is ridiculous. It's as if everything has been edited. They don't give us any information; nothing!"

"Well, at least we know that this world's Voldemort is in Azkaban, and that Minister Dumbledore put him there." H.J. had been surprised to find out that in this world Dumbledore had been made Minister after he'd defeated Grindelwald, and he was still holding that position.

"Well from that, we can certainly surmise some things." Harry put down the pile of newspapers he'd been scanning through. "Dumbledore might be power hungry or wishes to do good; hence his accepting the Minister's position. This world's Voldemort may well be weaker than Dumbledore as, contrary to the prophecy we know of in our worlds, Harry Potter didn't defeat him, and finally, this world may not even have a prophecy; there's certainly no mention of a Boy Who Lived in any of these papers."

"It still doesn't tell us anything about our Voldemort though. There's no mention of him anywhere." Mione was fed up with looking for something that just wasn't there.

"If he isn't being held in Azkaban, and we wouldn't know if he was, then perhaps he's gone to ground." H.J. suggested. "Either way, I doubt we're going to find him until he reveals himself."

"It's so bloody frustrating." Mione was tired and more than a little nervous about her upcoming enrollment into Hogwarts, and it was starting to show. "Harry gave up everything, and right now it looks as if it was all for nothing."

Harry put his arm around Mione's shoulders. "You don't know that."

H.J. put down the papers he was holding and left the room. Mione slid her arms around Harry's waist and laid her head on his chest. "I know but I can also tell you're not happy."

Harry stroked Mione's hair. "No, I'm not. I miss my family and friends, and before you ask, yes, I do have some regrets about leaving them."

Mione lifted her head. "You wouldn't be human if you didn't."

"Even though I thought things through for months before I made my decision to go through the veil, I now wonder if I made the right decision." Harry sighed. "Don't get me wrong. Being with you like this is amazing but I think I'm always going to miss my family."

H.J.'s voice drifted into the room. "Harry, we need to be going."

Harry looked down at Mione, and cupped her face before lowering his head to kiss her. After just a few moments, however, he withdrew. "I'm sorry."

Mione gently squeezed Harry. "You said yourself we need to take things slowly. It's going to take some getting used to for both of us."

Harry was glad that Mione understood, and he kissed her on the cheek. "I'll see you on Sunday. Good luck with the sorting."

"Thanks." Mione let Harry go and he hurried upstairs to collect the trunk he'd purchased at Diagon Alley when they'd all gone to buy clothes and supplies.

Harry made his way back downstairs to find H.J. waiting. "It's a good thing we've both got jobs. This money isn't exactly going to stretch too much further without them." Harry had almost used up the entirety of the money he'd brought with him.

"I'm sure we'll think of something." H.J. wasn't too concerned as for the next nine months or so, they'd have food and board provided for them.

"Probably." Harry put down his trunk and gave Mione one last hug before stepping back and allowing H.J. to do the same. "If you need us before Sunday then send Hedwig."

"I will." Mione smiled at the white owl they'd found at Eeylops Owl Emporium. They'd all been surprised to find that no-one had wanted to buy her; it was almost as if she'd been waiting for them. Both Harry and H.J. had missed the owl; H.J. more so than Harry, as at one time she'd pretty much been his constant companion when confined at the Dursleys before Severus had taken him in.

The duo then apparated out to Diagon Alley, leaving Mione alone to finish up her packing.

Hogwarts

Minerva looked down the list of first years who'd been offered a place at Hogwarts that year. Of the Muggleborns who'd been offered a spot, only one had accepted. Of the remaining students, just one hadn't replied, a half-blood. Getting up, she made her way over to the fireplace and firecalled Remus.

Remus looked distracted when his head appeared. "Minerva. Is this urgent? I'm pretty tied up at the moment."

"It is." Minerva needed Remus. "We've got a half-blood who hasn't responded. I've left it as long as I can."

Remus sighed. "Give me a minute and I'll be right with you."

When Remus finally made it to her office twenty minutes later, Minerva handed over the details of the student who had failed to respond. "These are the details you need."

Remus looked at the information. "Couldn't Lily or James have dealt with this?"

Minerva shook her head. "Lily refused me a few days ago when I asked her about the possibility, and James is collecting the Muggleborn." At that moment Minerva's fireplace pinged. "Excuse me, Remus." Minerva made her way over to the fireplace and checked who was incoming. Placing her hand on a small stone, she accepted the inbound wizards.

Harry stumbled out of the fireplace. Even after almost forty years of flooing, he'd still never managed to maintain his balance and hated the form of transportation. H.J. stepped fluidly out of the fireplace, not bothering to hide his glee at Harry, who was just getting back to his feet. "I'm sorry, headmistress. I thought we'd enter via the main entrance."

Minerva pushed the small stone again before returning to sit at her large oak desk. "It's okay, Mr. Sebastian. Actually, do you mind if I call you H.J? Otherwise it's going to be confusing with two Mr. Sebastian's." When H.J. shook his head, Minerva continued. "The reason you ended up here is that I haven't opened up the main floo yet, so all incoming and outgoing travel is taking place via my fireplace."

Minerva watched as Harry introduced H.J. to Remus. "Remus is here to fetch a student. I wonder if one of you would like to go with him?"

"Why are you fetching a student?" H.J. wondered if the student was in the same situation as he'd been in when Hagrid had appeared to fetch him.

"We've got a half-blood who hasn't responded to her letters." Minerva answered his question only to be met with blank looks on both Harry's and H.J.'s faces. "Of course, you probably have no idea what I'm going on about do you?"

Both Harry and H.J. shook their heads. Minerva gave a tight smile. "I should have remembered that President Manners doesn't agree with our policies here in Europe."

"Policies?" Harry wondered exactly what he'd missed when he'd been scanning the history books that he'd obtained.

"I'll explain while Remus and perhaps, H.J., go to collect our missing student." Minerva called out for a house-elf and instructed her that she wanted tea. "If that's okay with you, H.J.?"

H.J. had a feeling that this was more of an order than a request. "Of course. If someone could take my trunk to my rooms?"

"I'll ask Grapple to deal with it." Minerva got back up and pressed the small stone once more on the fireplace. "You can leave via the floo to Diagon Alley."

Once in Diagon Alley, Remus turned to H.J. "I'll just transfigure our clothes into something a little more suitable." H.J. waited while Remus did exactly that, and then he looked to Remus for directions, who told him to hold on as he was going to apparate them both to their destination.

H.J. did as he was asked and soon found himself in a Muggle neighborhood. As he followed Remus, H.J. asked about what Minerva had mentioned. "So do you want to fill me on this half-blood stuff?"

"I didn't realize that President Manners had totally banned all knowledge of European wizarding politics, especially in a place like Barstow Academy." Remus had thought that the Academy, being British based, would have covered it.

"I have to own up that Harry and I didn't exactly like history or politics and tended to ignore whatever the teachers taught in those lessons." H.J. lied as he made his way through very familiar territory.

Remus wasn't surprised. When he'd taught history and politics for a year at Hogwarts, his own students hadn't exactly been the most attentive. "I'll start with Muggleborns first. In England, and some parts of Europe, Muggleborns are given the choice to attend Hogwarts or a similar school. If they refuse they are stripped of their magic, and both they and their families are also stripped of any knowledge of magic."

"That's a little harsh, isn't it?" H.J. stopped walking. He didn't want to arrive at their destination before he'd discovered what he needed to know. "Whose bright idea was that?"

Remus realized that H.J. really hadn't paid attention in class. "Minister Dumbledore instigated it after he took office in 1946. I thought you would have at least learnt that."

"It rings a vague bell." H.J. pointed to a park bench. "I'm sure the student we need to collect can wait for five minutes while you fill me in on what I think I managed to sleep through in class."

Remus made his way over to the bench. "When Dumbledore defeated Grindelwald, and Grindelwald was taken in for questioning, it was discovered that Hitler had actually been a Muggleborn named Jan Becker. Becker's parents had mistreated him as a child when they discovered he was magical whereas they'd loved and cherished his non-magical sisters. Grindelwald, as everyone knows, wanted to take over the Muggle world. Because Becker hated the Muggle world, he happily went along with Grindelwald's plans. What was revealed from papers that were discovered in the bunker where Becker was found dead, was that Becker actually intended to kill Grindelwald before annihilating the wizarding world as well."

H.J. was reeling at what Remus was telling him. "So basically because one Muggleborn hated just about everyone this new law was enacted?"

"It was deemed as important to the safety of our existence. Dumbledore wasn't willing to take the chance that an atrocity like World War II could happen again. Now Muggleborns are Legilimized and if they pass scrutiny, they are offered the opportunity to attend Hogwarts." Remus could see that H.J. was disgusted by the law. "I wouldn't let anyone know how you feel about it, H.J."

H.J. looked contemplatively at Remus. "You don't agree either?"

"Of course I do." Remus sounded convincing.

H.J. just knew that Remus was lying. "So what's the deal with half-bloods?"

"All half-bloods must receive a magical education unless they opt freely to be stripped of their magic." Remus didn't agree with the laws by any stretch of the imagination but he hoped to convince H.J. that he did. "Minister Dumbledore didn't want to take the chance of the same thing happening to a child who'd been open to Muggle influence. If the Muggle parent objects to their child attending a

magical school and the child agrees, then we strip the child of magic. However, as they are still likely to have magical children, they aren't stripped of their knowledge."

"And what of the magical parent?" H.J. was feeling more and more sickened by what he was hearing.

"They can either return to the magical world alone, or they can stay with their families in the Muggle world. They aren't, however, stripped of their magic in case they wish to return to the magical world at any time but are forbidden to use it. It's very rare this ever happens though." Remus thought it was barbaric to restrict someone from use of their magic; he didn't know how he'd manage without his. "Purebloods are safe as they usually have no interaction with the Muggle world."

"I really did miss out on a lot in history and politics." H.J. gave a small smile before frowning. "But what happens if the same sort of thing happens in the US?"

"Then Europe goes into lockdown." Remus looked at H.J. funnily. "Everyone knows that."

"I do; I just wasn't thinking." H.J. really had no idea of what Remus was talking about, and made the decision to check out some history books from the library, as both Mione and Harry had suggested he do.

Remus checked the time. "As much as I've enjoyed giving you a potted history lesson, I've got things to do today and would like to get this student so that I can get back to work. So let's go and, please, just follow my lead."

H.J. could feel his stomach churning as Remus led the way into Privet Drive. It was almost as if he was a young boy again. Boxlike house after boxlike house stood in two rows on either side of a tarmac road. Most of the houses had perfectly manicured gardens, and the house that Remus stopped at was no different.

H.J. watched as Remus rang the doorbell inset into the wall beside the flawlessly red painted front door. After a few moments a young

overweight man answered the door . He took one look at Remus and H.J. and called out to his mother. "Mum, there are two men here for you." Dudley then made his way upstairs and into his bedroom before slamming the door behind him.

A skinny, long-necked blond haired woman replaced Dudley at the door. "Yes?"

"We're from your daughter's school, Mrs. Dursley." Remus waited for an explosion that didn't come.

Petunia's face changed from polite to welcoming. "Do come in."

Remus and H.J. followed Petunia into a sitting room so pristine it looked as if no-one ever used it. "Do sit down."

Remus waited for a change in Petunia's attitude when he started to explain exactly who he was. "I'm the defense teacher, Professor Lupin, and this is our flying instructor, Mr. Sebastian."

Petunia's face turned ugly. "You're not from Stonewall. You're from Hogwarts."

"We are." Remus stood back up.

"Get out of my house." Petunia pointed towards the door.

"Camellia is supposed to attend Hogwarts." Remus said quietly.

"She's going nowhere near that place." Petunia was vehement in her response.

Remus answered calmly. "You know our laws, Mrs. Dursley."

"I do, and I want Camellia stripped of her magic." Petunia snapped.

"That's not just your decision to make, Mrs. Dursley." Remus found that he disliked the woman he was facing. "It has to be Camellia's decision as well. So I need to see her."

"She's upstairs." Petunia didn't move.

H.J. scowled at the woman. "I'll get her." H.J. made his way to the top of the stairs and knocked on the door of the smallest room. He wasn't entirely surprised when the door opened and a small red-headed girl answered. "Who are you?"

"I'm H.J. I'm from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft..." H.J. got no further as Camellia went white.

The young girl backed away from H.J. "There's no such thing as magic."

H.J. also backed away as he didn't want to alarm Camellia any more than she was already. "Okay. But your mother needs you downstairs." H.J. stood well away from the door opening so that Camellia could come out.

Camellia bolted past H.J. before running down the stairs. As she entered the sitting room, she stopped when she saw the angry look on her mother's face. "You wanted me, Mother?"

"Yes." Petunia nodded towards Remus. "This person would like to ask you a few questions."

Remus smiled softly at Camellia, who looked like a frightened animal as she held onto the door jamb. "Camellia, my name is Remus Lupin. I'm from Hogwarts..."

Like H.J., Remus didn't get any further before Camellia interrupted him. "There's no such thing as magic." She then looked nervously at her mother.

Remus didn't have time to mess around and promptly petrified Petunia, causing Camellia to give a little scream and try to run, only to bump into H.J. who prevented her from making her exit. "Camellia, I promise I won't hurt you. All I've done is frozen your mother. She'll be just fine after I release her."

"Get away from me." Camellia was now shaking bodily.

“Camellia, please listen to me.” Remus smiled encouragingly at the girl. “I swear on my magic I won’t hurt you.”

Camellia watched as a white light covered Remus before dissipating. “But magic isn’t real.”

“It is Camellia. You've just seen it at work.” Remus held out a hand. “Please come and sit down.”

Knowing she couldn’t get away from Remus and H.J., Camellia did as she was asked. “But Mother and Father said...”

“They told you magic didn’t exist, didn’t they?” H.J. knew exactly how the Dursleys felt about magic.

Camellia nodded. “But why did they lie?”

“Your mother is what is known as a squib, Camellia. She has a little magical power but not enough to allow her to do active magic. You, on the other hand, are a fully fledged witch.” Remus held out his wand. “Take this.”

Camellia held out a hand hesitantly before drawing it back. “Mother will punish me.”

H.J. felt his blood begin to boil at Camellia's words. “No-one is going to punish you.”

Remus continued to smile reassuringly at the girl. “H.J. is right. No-one is going to punish you but I do need to do something called Legilimency. It’s just a way of checking on what you want. Do you trust me?”

Camellia glanced at the frozen figure of her angry faced mother before returning her gaze to Remus’ open and kind face. “I trust you.”

“Just relax and look at me.” Remus then cast the necessary spell before delving into the girl’s mind. When he withdrew, his face had

become angry and Camellia shrank back. "I'm not angry with you, Camellia."

Remus turned and released Petunia from her confinement. "As an agent of Hogwarts and the Ministry, I hereby take custody of this child."

"You can't do that." Petunia screeched. "She's my daughter."

"Something you should have remembered before you and your husband punished her for accidental magic." Remus was disgusted. "You won't be able to leave this house until a decision has been reached about what will happen to you."

Remus turned to Camellia. "You can't stay here. I know you believe in your magic, and I therefore cannot take it from you as your mother demands. If you stay here, they will continue to punish you for using it."

"But what will happen to me?" Camellia was frightened by both the anger in her mother's face and by what Remus had just told her.

"You'll be made a ward of Hogwarts until we can find a family to take you in." Remus laid a hand on her shoulder. "Would you like to press charges against your parents?"

Camellia looked down at the floor. "No."

H.J. invoked a privacy bubble around his and Remus' heads. "Doesn't Camellia have any family who can take her in?"

"She has an aunt but I doubt her husband would ever allow it, and I know that her aunt won't go against her husband's wishes." Remus didn't reveal that it was Lily Snape as he didn't want H.J. to think badly of a fellow teacher before really getting to know her.

"But she's her niece." H.J. noticed that Remus didn't reveal that Camellia's aunt was Lily.

“Petunia Dursley's sister swore to having nothing to do with her sister or her family a long time ago. Her aunt's husband isn't exactly fond of Petunia either, and I can't see him backing down from that stance.” Remus knew that Severus would refuse point blank to help. “But as Camellia's only magical family, her aunt will be asked first but I'd rather you didn't mention it to Camellia until she has been.”

“I won't.” H.J. then dropped the bubble before turning to Camellia. “Perhaps you'd like to join me in collecting your stuff.”

Camellia went with H.J. and headed up to the small room that she had spent most of her time outside of school in. “I'm scared.”

“It's okay to be scared.” H.J. felt sorry for the small girl. “But things will only get worse if you stay. Believe me, I've been in a similar situation and I know how it feels.”

“But why do they hate magic so much?” Camellia was somewhat relieved to find out that magic did exist.

“I don't know.” H.J. still didn't know what had fueled the Dursleys' hatred of magic. “We can talk about that later. Right now I need you to point out what clothes you want to take and anything else you wish to take with you.”

Camellia did as H.J. asked, tears beginning to run down her face as she faced up to the fact that she would probably never see the room or her family again. “That's it.”

H.J. placed everything into several pillowcases as he couldn't find anything else to put them in before shrinking them and placing them in his pocket. “Do you want to say goodbye to Dudley?”

Camellia didn't question how H.J. knew Dudley's name. “He just calls me freak. We hardly ever speak.”

H.J. realized that this Dudley had more in common with his Dudley than with the one that Harry had known in his world. “Let's go.”

Remus was waiting for them. "I've set up the wards. We're ready." He looked at Petunia. "Do you have anything to say to Camellia before she leaves?"

Petunia did. "If you step foot outside with those freaks, then you're never welcome in this house again."

Camellia shrank against H.J. at her mother's vicious tone. H.J. took Camellia's hand and led her outside; Remus followed. "What now?"

"We'll deliver Camellia to Madam Pomfrey. We can apparate directly to Hogwarts' gates. I think a floo ride might be too much for Camellia." Remus led the way back to the point they'd originally apparated from. He then knelt down in front of Camellia. "We're going to do something called apparating. I need you to take a deep breath and close your eyes."

Camellia did as Remus asked. Moments later she gasped as the horrible constricting feeling ended and she found herself facing a set of iron wrought gates. "Where are we?"

"Hogwarts." Remus pushed open the gates and led the way up the grass lined pathway. "H.J. can you take Camellia's things to Minerva's office. She'll get a house-elf to deal with them."

H.J. and Remus and Camellia then went off in different directions.

Later that day

Harry was a little surprised to find himself being introduced again to Remus by Sybil Trelawney. "Hello again, Mr. Lupin."

Remus smiled. "Harrison, you can call me Remus."

"Then please, call me Harry." Harry thanked Sybil for introducing them. The witch smiled hazily and wandered off.

"Harry it is." Remus nodded politely at H.J. "Thanks for your help earlier today."

"Is Camellia alright?" H.J.'s thoughts had been on the girl all afternoon.

"She is." Remus led H.J. and Harry to one side. "Minerva asked her aunt to take her in, but as I thought she would, she refused."

Harry was stunned. "I can't believe it."

"Her aunt already has four children of her own to take care of." Remus knew that his excuse was half-hearted.

"I presume that her husband refused as well." H.J. made sure he didn't look across the room to where he knew Lily was standing talking to a sour-faced, dark-haired man.

"He did." Remus offered no excuse for Severus. "But the Ministry and Hogwarts will work together to find a suitable family to place Camellia with."

"I'll take her." H.J. didn't know why, but he couldn't just leave Camellia to an unknown family. Her vulnerability had touched him, and she reminded him a little of his former wife.

"Don't you think you're a little young?" Remus hadn't expected H.J. to make such an offer.

"Will I be allowed to take her in?" H.J. didn't know how the laws worked in this world.

"As long as you can show that you have the means to support her and pass an interview, then yes." Remus had toyed with the idea himself but knew that splitting his time between the Watchers' Council and Hogwarts would preclude such an offer. He just wouldn't have the time he needed to take care of the girl during the holidays.

"Can you set things in motion for me?" H.J. ignored Harry's jab in his arm.

"I can start on it tomorrow." Remus excused himself to go and talk to Minerva.

Harry dragged H.J. even further away from everyone. "Just what the hell are you playing it? You barely know her."

"I can't leave her to some random family." H.J. could tell Harry didn't understand. "I know she's not my family really but she feels that way. Also I know what it was like to grow up with the Dursleys when they resented anything to do with magic."

"But we don't have any means of support except for these positions." Harry pointed out.

"After you mentioned money this morning, I started thinking about what we could do to solve our money problem. I think I've found it." H.J. grinned. "I've come across no record of the Chamber being opened. Hagrid is still gamekeeper so I presume his innocence hasn't been established. Obviously no-one has found the diary or it doesn't exist."

"You want to tackle a basilisk?" Harry thought H.J. had taken leave of his senses.

"I just need a rooster. I kill the basilisk, and we make a lot of money selling its parts." H.J. said it as if it was the simplest thing in the world.

"How do you know it's valuable here?" Harry asked.

"There's one way to find out." H.J. marched over to where Severus was talking to Lily. "Excuse me, Professor but we haven't been introduced. I'm the new flying assistant, H.J. Sebastian."

Severus looked down his nose at the young man who'd interrupted his conversation. "Don't you think it more polite to wait until we've been introduced formally?"

Remus overheard the conversation and stepped in. "Let me do that now. H.J. Sebastian, this is Professor Severus Snape who teaches potions, and his wife, Professor Lily Evans."

Severus scowled at Remus. "I think we could have managed, Lupin."

“Just being helpful, Severus.” Remus then went back to his original conversation with Minerva.

H.J. wasn't put off by Severus' attitude. “I've heard that you are the foremost authority on potions in England. I like to dabble myself but am in need of a good dealer. Is there anyone you could recommend?”

“No.” Severus turned his back on H.J.

H.J. mumbled to himself as he began to walk away. “Looks as though I'll have to find someone to take the basilisk skin myself then.”

Severus swung back round. “You have basilisk skin?”

“Not right now but I know where I can get some.” H.J. feigned an air of disinterest. “But you've already made it perfectly clear that you're not interested, so if you'll excuse me.”

“Wait.” Severus snapped out the word. “I may be interested in the basilisk. When could you obtain it?”

“Within a week.” H.J. just hoped that the basilisk was in the chamber.

“When you have it, let me know and I will examine the sample. If I find it adequate, I will pass on the name of a dealer who might be able to help you.” Severus inclined his head slightly. “Sebastian.”

“Professor.” H.J. walked back over to where Harry was still standing. “Well, he's taken the bait.”

“I just hope you can meet his expectations.” Harry looked Severus over. “I've got a feeling he isn't a person to trust.”

“I don't know about that.” H.J. had been hoping that it would be Severus. “He was this rude in my world when I first met him.”

"It isn't his rudeness; there's just an air about him." Harry frowned. "I don't know what to make of Lily Evans either. She didn't even open her mouth when you were over there."

"She did seem a little odd." H.J. had expected Lily to be more like Harry's mother had been.

Remus once more interrupted the pair, and the two of them found themselves face to face with James Potter. "Harry, H.J., this is James Potter, deputy head."

H.J. and Harry both shook hands with James. "What do you teach, Professor Potter?" Harry felt a little more relaxed around the man now that he didn't look anything like the Harry of this world.

"In private it's James, and I teach a combined class of Politics and History." James informed him. "But I dabbled with teaching with Charms and Defense before settling on my current choice."

"Speaking of Defense, even though we've met most of the other teachers, I'm still not sure who is teaching that class." Harry had expected to find Quirrell or even Lockhart in the school.

Remus grinned ruefully. "Sorry, I must have forgotten to mention it. I'm one of the two teachers who deals with it. I can't do it full time as I've taken over as head of the Watchers' Council."

"So who is the other one?" Harry asked.

"I am." Lily stepped over to meet the two new recruits formally. "I'm Lily Snape."

Harry was surprised to find that Lily had left Severus' side. "Harry Sebastian. This is..."

"H.J., I know." Lily gave a brief smile to H.J. "I'm sorry I didn't say anything earlier but I don't like to interrupt when Severus is conducting business."

Harry and H.J. both found this Lily a little confusing. H.J. shrugged and glossed over it. "That's perfectly understandable, Professor. Can you tell me why you are called Professor Evans and not Snape?"

"It's my maiden name. It's also a little less confusing for students." Lily smiled. "I expect the students will have the same problem with you two sharing the same last name."

"I'm going to ask the students to call me H.J." H.J. hated the name Mr. Sebastian. "Harry will be Mr. Sebastian, so problem solved."

Lily frowned. "Don't you think that's a little too familiar?"

"Not as long they respect the fact that I'm their teacher, then no." H.J. informed her. "The minute they step out of line, they'll soon find out that just because I'm friendly doesn't mean that I'm their friend."

Lily relaxed. "I understand. Now if you'll both excuse me, I need to get back to Severus."

Harry watched Lily leave. Remus misread Harry's interest in Lily as he watched her walk away. "Not only is she married to Severus, but she's happily married, so I'd forget about it."

Harry blushed. "I'm not interested in her like that. It's just that she reminds me of someone."

"Lost love?" Remus teased Harry.

"Not exactly." Harry tore his gaze away from Lily.

Remus realized Harry didn't want to discuss it. "In that case, is there likely to be someone who's going to miss you while you're based here?"

"No." Harry knew that he could see Mione whenever he wanted to. "How about you?"

Remus laughed. "I barely get time to sleep, let alone date. Something you're about to find out."

“Great.” Harry gave a rueful smile. “Thanks for the warning.”

“Which is why I didn’t tell you before you took the job. I didn’t want to frighten you away.” Remus teased.

Harry laughed. “You’d have had to have tried a lot harder than that to get rid of me.”

H.J. turned to Remus. “So what’s the lowdown on the teachers here?”

Remus knew that they’d find out one way or another. “Why don’t you two come join me for a drink in my rooms?”

Harry and H.J. followed Remus out and headed to the rooms that Remus occupied. Once inside H.J. looked around. “Very nice.”

“Thanks.” Remus walked into the kitchenette. “Tea, coffee or something stronger?”

“Red wine if you’ve got it.” Harry scanned the room. The room was reminiscent of his own Dad’s taste but with a little more flair.

H.J. opted for a beer and the three men sat down. “So what didn’t you want to discuss in front of everyone?”

“One moment.” Remus smiled at the portrait that adorned his wall. “Frances, these are Harry and H.J. Sebastian. Harry’s the new librarian for Hogwarts, and once the Academy is built next door, he’ll be sharing his time between here and there. H.J. is Mara’s new assistant.”

“Hello boys.” Frances smiled at the two young men. “Remus, I take it you want to talk privately?”

“You’re correct.” Remus informed the woman, who promptly disappeared. “We can talk freely now.”

“Don’t you trust her?” Harry wondered whether this Frances was the same as the portrait he’d known in his own world; she certainly looked identical.

“I do. Which is why she is making sure that no-one is anywhere near this room.” Remus put down his beer. “What I’m going to tell you isn’t exactly confidential but I’d rather people didn’t find out you got it from me.”

“That’s fair enough.” Harry acknowledged. “We won’t tell anyone.”

Remus then told them what he couldn’t discuss in the staff room. “Let’s start at the top. Minerva is a decent enough woman. She’s worked hard to get to the position she’s in. But don’t cross her, as she doesn’t suffer fools gladly. “

Harry and H.J. both shared a significant glance. This Minerva sounded a lot like the Minerva of their own worlds. Harry asked about the one professor he was most interested in. “What about Lily Snape?”

Unaware of Harry’s history with the Lily of his own world, Remus was still convinced that Harry had a thing for the red-headed professor. “She was once married to James Potter. He married Lily against the wishes of his parents when she was pregnant with their first child, Katherine. Eleven months later, their son Harry made his appearance but by then things had denigrated to an almost intolerable situation between them. They may have been polite earlier tonight, but believe me there’s no love lost between the two of them. Normally I wouldn’t gossip but I didn’t want you putting your foot in it. It doesn’t take much for James to go off the deep end.”

“Is James unstable?” In spite of his question, Harry couldn’t see how anyone unstable would be deputy headmaster.

“Not at all.” Remus smiled. “But he’s always been a little easy to set off and any mention of Lily seems to do that. They interact sociably when they have to, but behind closed doors things are a different matter.”

"So how did she end up marrying Severus Snape?" H.J. wanted more information on the man he hoped was the person they could trust.

"They were friends until she fell for James. When she left James, Severus provided the shoulder Lily needed to cry on and two months later they were married." Remus had been a little shocked at the speed in which the two had gone from being friends to getting married.

"I couldn't quite get a grip on Lily." H.J. admitted. "She acted all subservient around Snape and then was quite outgoing when she came over."

"Unlike in the US, women over here always defer to their husbands. I thought you two had English parents." Remus picked his beer back up and used a cooling spell on it as it had started to get a little warm.

"We do but we spent very little time with our parents; most of it was spent with our nanny until we were shipped off to school." Harry lied smoothly. "We may as well not have known them."

"Typical pureblood behavior." Remus accepted Harry's explanation without question. "So is there anything else you two would like to ask while we're here?"

"I'm thinking of conducting some business with Professor Snape." H.J. decided to get Remus' opinion of the Professor. "I'd like to know how trustworthy he is."

"I barely know you; why do you think I'd discuss another Professor's trustworthiness with you?" Remus was a little taken aback at H.J.'s directness.

"Because I don't believe you really like him." H.J. had been watching Remus carefully when he'd talking about Severus. "And because I think you like us, otherwise why would you go out of your way to help us out with classroom politics?"

Remus laughed. "You're very astute. I do like you both but I still don't really indulge in gossip about fellow Professors. The reason I've told

you what I have so far, is that it's common knowledge, and I'd prefer you hear the correct version of it rather than a mangled grapevine version."

"Fair enough." H.J. let the subject drop.

Remus decided to cut H.J. a break. "I might not gossip but I will warn you. Don't screw with Severus; he can be a nasty piece of work."

Harry wondered if the Severus of this world had been a Death Eater. "H.J. won't. Is there anything else we need to know?"

Remus filled them in on the other bits and pieces about some of the other teachers and the school that they might find useful. "That's about it really."

Harry stood up. "Thanks Remus. I appreciate you filling us in on all of this."

"Any time." Remus stood up. "One last word of warning. When it comes to the students, Muggleborns in America may be treated as equal citizens; here in Europe things are different. Don't show any favoritism towards them; you'll only cause trouble for them if you do."

Harry scowled. "Why come here if that's how they're going to be treated?"

"Because they're enamored with the idea of magic. Many refuse to attend when they learn of the status quo, but others still persevere. Unfortunately once they've signed a magical contract to attend they are obliged to attend all seven years. We've had a case of a few of them disappearing altogether when they couldn't take it." Remus knew that he could get into trouble telling Harry and H.J. but he didn't want them floundering. "In each case they were brought back, and made to finish school out. If they hadn't been, they'd have ended up dead as they'd broken a magical promise. Once they finish school, most of them move over to the States or Australia where they are more accepted in society."

"Who polices the rule about Muggleborns?" So far Harry didn't exactly feel enamored of his new world.

"The Auror Division of the Ministry." Remus didn't like the rule any more than Harry did, but he didn't feel secure enough to tell Harry and H.J. that, as they barely knew each other.

"Thanks for the warning." Harry decided that he didn't want to push his luck with Remus; the man had told them enough already. "And I'll see you in the library in the morning."

"Goodnight." Remus closed the door behind Harry and H.J. and called out to Frances. "Frances, you can come out now."

Frances reappeared in her empty frame. "I listened in as you knew I would."

"And..?" Remus put a lot of store in Frances' opinion.

"I trust H.J." Frances hesitated. "Harry is a little harder to read though. There's something about him that I can't put my finger on."

"I know what it is. Our friend Harry is hiding a secret." Remus picked up the last of his beer and poured it down the sink. He then poured out two glasses of red wine before handing one into the portrait. "Do you think I should tell him that I know he's a werewolf?"

"Only if you can trust him totally not to tell anyone about you." Frances reached out and took the glass of wine. "If you can't, then think I'd at least tell him that you know what he is. He might need some support after the night of the full moon. You know how hard it is to cope, and you've got the only contact in this country we know of who would be willing to help."

"I want to talk to Grim first though; see if he doesn't mind making more of the potions." Remus was grateful that he was good friends with Grimstock Glendower, a leading potions expert; he'd provided Remus with a potion to help with the pain of transformation as well as one to mask anything that would reveal what he truly was.

"I'm sure he would." Frances remembered Grim from when he'd attended Hogwarts. "He was always a nice boy."

"That was some time ago Frances." Remus reminded her. "But you're right; he probably wouldn't mind. Now I think it's time I went to bed."

"Or you could join me." Frances offered.

Remus knew that Frances wouldn't be offended by his refusal. "Not tonight. I've got a ton of papers I want to look through in bed, and I need to be up early."

"I can't believe Minerva made you honor your contract." Frances had expected Minerva to release Remus when he came the head of the Watchers' Council.

"She can't do anything about it, Frances. I agreed to serve ten years when I signed up here, and Minerva's already doing me a favor by cutting back my duties to just teaching the fifth to seventh years." Remus picked up his papers. "Now, I really need to get on with this."

"Goodnight then." Frances left the portrait as Remus headed into his bedroom.

After leaving Remus' rooms, Harry and H.J. didn't say much until they'd gotten into their rooms. Then Harry invoked a privacy bubble. "So what do you think?"

"Of what?" H.J. knew exactly what Harry was hinting at.

"I want to tell Remus about us." Harry had felt drawn to the man who so closely resembled his own father.

"But he might not be the right person." H.J. still wanted to trust Severus.

"H.J. You heard Remus. You can't honestly think Severus is the right person to trust?" Harry himself had wanted to trust Severus but after seeing the man, he'd slipped way down the list of people in this world that Harry would ever trust.

“No but I can’t just rule him out either.” H.J. admitted.

“We won’t.” Harry promised. “Look, let’s deal with the basilisk first and then see how the meeting with him goes.”

H.J. let out a long sigh. “That sounds fair. I think I need to go to bed. It’s been a long day.”

“I know.” Harry placed a hand on H.J.’s arm. “And about earlier; if you decide to take Camellia in, then I’ll support you.”

“Thanks.” H.J. gave Harry a brief hug before opening the door to the room he’d chosen earlier. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, H.J.” Harry opened his own door and headed for the bathroom. Despite what he’d told H.J. about Severus, he just had a feeling that Remus was the right person to go to in this world. Knowing that mulling over it wouldn’t change things, he entered the bathroom and closed the door behind him.

Next Chapter: Hermione gets sorted and makes some new friends; Remus makes an overture towards Harry; H.J. tackles a basilisk.

Chapter 6: Getting into the swing of things

September 1st 2002

Mione sat nervously in the side room and waited for her name to be called. Minerva had decided to let the girl be sorted before the first years arrived. Cassandra Black put her head around the door. "Miss Dominic?"

"Yes." Mione didn't recognize the girl.

"They're ready for you." Cassandra stood back and waited for Mione to leave.

Mione stepped out and headed towards the stool where the sorting hat had been placed. A red-headed woman Mione immediately recognized, smiled at her. "Just sit down and place the hat on your head."

Mione nervously sat down as Lily had told her to, and placed the hat on her head, and a voice she'd heard once before made itself known. "Hello."

Mione knew to think her answers. "Hello."

"You're not exactly who you appear to be are you, Miss Snape?" The hat knew exactly who Mione was. "Or perhaps I should call you the former Mrs. Lupin."

"Are you going to tell anyone?" Mione asked.

"No. It's not my place to and I know that you mean well." The hat debated where to send Mione. "I don't think Slytherin will suit you this time. Of the houses four, I think it best be RAVENCLAW."

Mione made her way somewhat shakily to the Ravenclaw table where she found the same girl who'd come to collect her had made a space for her. "Thank you."

The dark haired girl held out her hand. "I'm the head girl. My name's Cassandra Black."

Mione shook the proffered hand. "Mione Dominic."

"That's an unusual first name." Cassandra pointed out.

"It's actually Hermione but I prefer the shortened version." Mione explained. "Do you prefer Cassandra or a shortened version of your own name?"

"Dad calls me Cassie but it's a bit of a baby name." Cassandra informed her. "We'll talk again after the firsties have been inducted and the headmistress has done her speech."

Mione watched as one by one each child was allocated their house and Minerva began to introduce both Harry and H.J. as new teachers. She felt Cassandra straighten up as H.J. was introduced. "He's hot."

"I know both him and Harry Sebastian. They're neighbors and attended the same Academy as I did, but obviously they were a few years ahead of me." Mione smiled as Harry was introduced as the new librarian to replace Irma Pince who'd left a few months earlier.

"You'll have to tell me more after dinner." Cassandra turned her attention back to the teachers' table. "I see they've got Uncle Remus in to do some more teaching again. I'd have thought he'd have given it up."

Mione hadn't spotted Remus until he'd stood up when Minerva acknowledged his presence, and the fact that he was kindly still taking the fifth to seventh years even though he also had other duties. Even though Mione had seen this world's Remus in the newspaper picture, it hadn't done him justice, particularly as his celluloid counterpart had spent most of his time with his hands in front of his face. "Bloody hell."

Cassandra grinned at her new housemate. "All the girls are like that over Uncle Remus but he never seems to have any interest."

"Is he gay?" Mione thought it wouldn't hurt to ask.

Cassandra shrugged. "I really don't know. I've never seen him out with a woman so your guess is as good as mine. Since he agreed to become a Watcher as well as serving as the Defense teacher he's barely had time to come up for air, let alone look at a woman, and I can't see that changing now that he's taken over as head of the Council."

Mione was surprised at how open and friendly Cassandra was being. "Thanks for being so welcoming."

"It's okay. But I should warn you that most of the girls don't particularly like me. If you stick with me you're going to be in the same boat." Cassandra told her.

"Well it looks as if I'm going to be in the same boat then." Mione liked the talkative but friendly girl. "So why don't they like you?"

"They think I'm going to tell Dad what goes on here." Cassandra pulled a face. "As if I would."

"What do you mean?" Mione wondered what interest Sirius could have in Hogwarts.

"You'll find out." Cassandra answered her cryptically. "One of my best friends is actually sitting across from us." Cassandra nudged the paper that was hiding the girl's face. "Luna."

Luna lifted her head from the paper that Mione recognized as being the Quibbler. "Cassandra?"

"Luna, this is Mione Dominic. She's in my year." Cassandra introduced the two girls to each other. "Mione, this is Luna Lovegood."

"Do you think she might want to share with us?" Luna played with her blond hair as she eyed Mione.

"Would you like to?" Cassandra asked.

"What do you mean, share?" Mione queried.

"I've had a suite since first year and I can ask anyone I want to share it with me. So, would you like to?" Cassandra asked again.

"But you barely know me." Mione pointed out as she wondered if everyone had suites.

"I like you. And Luna appears to like you, so that's good enough for me." Cassandra told Mione. "Luna's a good judge of character."

Mione realized that she'd probably learn more about Hogwarts from sharing a room with Cassandra and Luna than in any other way. "I'd love to if you wouldn't mind."

"I wouldn't have asked if I did." Cassandra stood up. "I'll be back shortly."

Mione smiled at Luna. "It's very kind of you to ask me to share."

"I think you need our help." Luna looked over at Mione. "And I know we'll be friends."

Mione didn't get a chance to ask Luna anything else about her comment as Cassandra quickly returned. "I've asked Brizel to move your stuff into my suite and to add another bed."

Mione glanced nervously at Luna who simply started to read her paper again. "Who is Brizel?"

"My house elf." Cassandra explained. "Having a suite, I was allowed to bring one of the house elves from home with me to take care of it. Even if I hadn't had a suite, as head girl, I would have been allowed to bring a house elf."

"Who is head boy?" Mione looked round at many of the familiar faces at the school.

"Cedric Diggory." Cassandra pulled a face. "He's a Hufflepuff."

“Don’t you like him?” Mione asked as she picked at the food on her plate. She’d found that since she’d arrived, she could eat and drink but didn’t necessarily have to.

“We’ll carry on this conversation later.” Cassandra didn’t want to discuss her personal feelings about others so openly. “Let’s wait until we get to the suite.”

An hour later Mione found herself being introduced to Cassandra’s other roommate. “This is Katherine Potter; she’s in Gryffindor.”

“Hello. So how did you all meet?” Mione was interested to find out how the three very different girls had become friends.

Katherine smiled. “I’ve been friends with Cassandra since we were small, and we promised each other that we’d stay that way no matter what house we were in. Uncle Remus and Dad are friendly with Luna’s uncle and mother so we’ve also known her for a long time.”

“So the three of you share this suite?” Mione looked around the large cream painted room. Furnishings of brown leather and chocolate colored throw cushions took up a large expanse in front of the fire. Four desks lined the far wall; one was empty and Mione presumed that it was probably for her.

Cassandra nodded. “I’ve had a private suite since I started. My father sponsored it.”

Mione frowned. “Sponsored a suite? Doesn’t everyone have one?”

Cassandra shook her head and explained. “There are two suites available to each year at Hogwarts. If a parent wishes a child to have exclusive use of a suite, then he or she pays a sum to Hogwarts which goes to the benefit of the school. You get priority according to rank. Because Dad is the head of Auror Division he ranks higher than any of the other parents except for Uncle James who’s a member of the British wizarding nobility.”

Mione thought the system was rather feudal in nature but as she was about to share one of the suite's didn't voice her opinion. "So it's just been the three of you up until now."

"Yep." Cassandra smiled as Brizel appeared with four mugs of hot chocolate. "I hope you like hot chocolate."

"I do." Mione sank into one of the sofas. "I hope you don't mind that I've invaded your space, Katherine."

"I don't, and anyway, it's not my decision as to who Cassandra asks to share this suite." Katherine answered Mione while looking directly at her. "Besides, you must be alright otherwise Cassandra wouldn't have done it."

"I have to admit that part of the reason I did it is because I know that despite you're being a pureblood, some of the others in your dorm wouldn't have been too welcoming as you are an outsider." Cassandra hated prejudice in any form. "You'll find that things are a little different in Hogwarts than they might have been in your old school."

"I've read a few history books and I gathered that would be the case." Mione took a sip of the creamy chocolate. "So I really am grateful to you for taking me under your wing."

"And you look like fun." Cassandra grinned. "Now we've got that out of the way, how about filling me in on our sexy new flying assistant."

Luna smirked. "Which is probably the real reason she asked you to share."

Mione coughed as she choked on her hot chocolate. "H.J. sexy? You've got be kidding me."

Katherine's face lit up. "You know him?"

"Yes, and your new librarian, Harry Sebastian." Mione had a feeling that H.J. was going to be getting something of a fan club.

"I think I prefer the look of the librarian." Luna piped up. "He has a more open and friendly face."

Mione tamped down on her feeling of jealousy that threatened to rear its ugly head. "I prefer Harry as well."

"Are you two together?" Katherine was a closet romantic.

Mione decided to tell the girls about them. "Sort of but we can hardly date in school."

Katherine sighed. "I think that is so dreamy. Just think you'll probably have to sneak around for clandestine meetings in dark corners."

Mione laughed. "We're no Romeo and Juliet you know."

"Still, it is romantic." Katherine gave another sigh. "I wish I had a relationship like that."

Cassandra threw a pillow at Katherine. "I bet you wish you had a relationship at all."

"You try dating someone when both of your parents and your stepfather are professors." Katherine threw the pillow back at Cassandra.

"Who are your parents?" Mione innocently asked.

"My Dad is James Potter, the history teacher. Mum started to help Uncle Remus with Defense two years ago when he agreed to finish his training as a Watcher; she's Professor Evans." Katherine then pulled a face. "My stepfather is Professor Snape who teaches potions."

"I take it you don't like him." Mione noticed that none of the girls looked happy at the mention of Severus' name.

"If I tell you, you've got to promise not to tell anyone else; not even your friends." Katherine looked a little scared.

Mione hid her frown and agreed. "I promise."

"He's vile. During the holidays I have to spend time with him and Mum. We've never gotten along." Katherine shuddered. "He really gives me the creeps."

Mione wondered how different this Severus was. "How long has your mother been married to him?"

"Since just after my brother Harry was born. Harry's a sixth year." Katherine pulled another face. "Snivellus likes Harry though."

"Snivellus?" Mione knew where that nickname had come from.

"I shouldn't really use that name but it's what Dad calls him." Katherine's face changed as she mentioned her Dad. "And Uncle Sirius does as well."

Mione looked from Katherine to Cassandra. "So you two are related?"

Cassandra shook her head. "No, but our parents have been friends since they went to Hogwarts together so we've always called each other parents Uncle or Aunt."

"So Luna, do any of you have siblings?" Mione was interested to find out as much as she could.

Luna shook her head. "I'm an only child. Daddy died in an accident when I was two. Mummy's taken care of me ever since. We actually live with my Uncle Grimstock in Hogsmeade."

"I'm sorry about your Dad." Mione wondered how many different variations there were on everyone's lives. Mione looked at Cassandra. "How about you?"

"I've just one got brother, Orion. He's a sixth year Hufflepuff." Cassandra grinned. "He's a sweetheart, and has a thumping crush on Luna, who simply refuses to go out with him, no matter what my poor brother does."

Luna raised her hands defensively. "I've never encouraged him. He's sweet but I don't like him like that."

Mione decided to get Luna off the hook and returned her attention to Katherine. "So Katherine, apart from Harry, do you have any other siblings?"

Katherine nodded. "Silas, who's fourteen and a Slytherin, and Felicia, who's ten."

"Do you get along with them?" Mione still missed her own brothers and sister.

"No." Katherine didn't say much more than that, and then turned the spotlight back on Mione. "How about you? Do you have any siblings?"

"Three." Mione wasn't going to deny her brothers and sister, even though they were in another world. "Two brothers, Dominic and Bas and one sister, Livvy. They're still with my parents. They travel around a lot so I don't really get to see much of them."

"Headmistress McGonagall said something about you coming from the States. Why did you leave there?" Cassandra was as interested in Mione as Mione was in the three of them.

"I didn't feel that challenged at the Barstow Academy, and someone suggested spending my final year here at Hogwarts." Mione knew that her true excitement about being at Hogwarts was showing. "I'm looking forward to the classes here."

Cassandra gave a big grin. "I can see why they put you in Ravenclaw."

"Are there any house prejudices?" Mione wanted to find out if it was the same in every world.

"Definitely." Cassandra confirmed. "Ravenclaw is the house everyone wants to be in."

Katherine gave a very unladylike snort. "So says a Ravenclaw. Gryffindor is much better."

Mione smiled. "So yes, I'd say there's house prejudices. Which is the worst house?"

All three girls chorused "Slytherin" at the same time making everyone laugh. Cassandra tried to control her mirth. "Both of my cousins and Katherine's brothers are in that house."

Mione wondered who Cassandra's cousins were. "Cousins?"

Cassandra obviously was as fond of her cousins as Katherine was of her half-siblings. "Perseus and Carina Black; they're the children of my Uncle Regulus and his wife Petronella."

"Don't you like them either?" Mione was a little dismayed to find so much family discordance.

"I don't really have much to do with them as Dad and his brother haven't spoken for years." Cassandra admitted. "I don't know why though."

Mione had a feeling that she had a fairly good idea why. "What about your mother? What does she do?"

Cassandra's face fell. "She died giving birth to Orion."

"I'm so sorry." Mione was immediately regretful. "I really put my foot in it."

"It's okay." Cassandra assured her. "I barely remember Mum."

Mione hoped she wasn't going further into forbidden territory with her next question. "And has your Dad remarried?"

Cassandra shook her head. "No. He said that he's never met anyone he cared enough about to since Mum died. He's dated but his relationships rarely last long."

"I'm sorry. I think I should find something else to quiz you on." Mione began to feel a little guilty at her prying questions. "Tell me about Diggory."

"He absolutely loves himself." Luna interjected before Cassandra could say anything. "Ever since he won the Triwizard Tournament he's been almost unbearable."

"Diggory won it?" Mione couldn't help but exclaim. "Who was he up against?"

"Viktor Krum of Durmstrang and Chloe Dubois of Beauxbatons." Katherine hadn't really liked either of them. "Chloe was a last minute replacement after Fleur Delacoeur disappeared. They found her body a few days later."

Mione wondered if this was anything to do with Voldemort. "What happened to her?"

Cassandra shrugged. "No-one knows. Dad had Aunt Bella investigating it for months but nothing was ever discovered." Cassandra watched her new friend frown and decided that it was a little too much information for a first evening. "I think it's time for another subject change."

"Okay, then. So do you have a boyfriend?" Mione asked interestedly.

Cassandra shook her head. "Not lately. I did date Roger Davies for a few weeks at the end of last year but he was boring, so I finished with him."

Mione looked at Luna. "How about you?"

"No-one except for Orion likes me." Luna shrugged her shoulders. "But I don't care."

Mione had a feeling that Luna did care. "I'm not a boy but I like you."

Luna smiled. "I thought you would."

"And as I've already said, no-one is interested in dating me with my parents being teachers here." Katherine sighed. "Do you think H.J. might be willing to ignore them and ask me out on a date?"

Cassandra stuck out her tongue at her friend. "I saw him first."

"Girls, aren't you forgetting something?" Mione chided them gently. "H.J. is twenty-two and a teacher."

"And Harry's pretty much a teacher but you're still into him." Katherine teased. "So what kind of girl does H.J. like?"

"Older ones." Mione hoped to put the girls off from chasing after H.J. She had a feeling that the one girl in the group who hadn't professed to liking him would be the one girl that H.J. would like.

"Perhaps we can persuade him to change his mind." Katherine gave a small giggle. "I wonder if he's a good kisser."

Mione groaned. "I wouldn't know."

"Is Harry a good kisser?" Luna asked quietly.

"Yes." Mione blushed as she answered the question. "And no, I'm not willing to share him."

Luna looked almost as dreamy as Katherine had. "That's a shame because I think Harry is very attractive." She then winked at Mione. "But I'd never do anything about it because he's your boyfriend."

"Unlike some." Katherine informed Mione. "I'd warn Harry and H.J. away from Ginny Weasley. She's a sixth year Gryffindor and has a reputation for being a bit of a man-eater."

"I'll remember that." Hermione yawned. "I'm sorry but it's been a long day. Would you mind if I went to bed?"

Cassandra led her through to the bedroom. "That's your bed over there."

Mione smiled at the girl. "Thanks." After showering, Mione got into bed and thought about what she'd learned. After spending an hour pondering her day, she knew that she really should get some sleep. The next day was a Monday and school would begin in earnest.

The three girls in the sitting room had waited for the sound of the shower before discussing their new roommate. "I really like her but why did you offer to share? You don't even know her." Katherine asked.

"I don't know." Cassandra shrugged her shoulders. "Luna suggested it and it just felt like the right thing to do."

"It is the right thing to do." Luna put down her mug. "I don't know why but I believe Mione's going to need our help."

The two girls were used to Luna's declarations being right. Katherine gave a smile. "In that case, she's one of us."

The other two girls hugged Katherine before the three of them headed for the showers that formed part of the en-suite.

The Next Morning

Harry stopped by the Ravenclaw table to greet Mione. "Good morning, Mione."

"Mr. Sebastian." Mione didn't really want to be too informal at the table with other students watching.

Cho Chang looked over at the new girl. "You know him?"

"He was my neighbor back home." After what Cassandra had said, Mione hadn't expected anyone to talk to her.

"He's hot." Cho looked Harry up and down. "Any chance of an introduction?"

"He's the librarian. You could just introduce yourself." Mione hid her irritation at the question.

"True." Cho then went back to talking to her friend.

Cassandra slid into the space beside Mione. "Diggory won't like that. Chang's his girlfriend."

"Well, as Harry's not likely to be interested, Diggory hasn't got anything to worry about." Mione replied primly. "What is it with the interest in Harry and H.J. anyway? They're just two new teachers of sorts."

"They're young and good looking, Mione." Cassandra pointed out. "Who else fits that bill around here?"

"Professor Lupin." Mione glanced up to where Remus was deep in conversation with Harry.

"But he's my Uncle, and possibly gay." Cassandra reminded Mione. "So I'm hardly going to find him attractive."

Mione blushed. "Sorry, I didn't think." Any further talk was brought to a halt as Professor Flitwick appeared with everyone's timetables.

At the teachers' table, Harry finished his coffee. "I'd better get started."

Remus looked down at Harry's empty plate. "Not eating?"

"Not today." Harry's stomach was in knots and coffee was about all he could manage. He hadn't expected to feel that way. He'd headed numerous missions; ran meetings and organized more things than he cared to mention, yet being faced with the library had him in a bit of a tizzy.

"Nervous?" Remus asked quietly.

Harry nodded. "A little."

"You'll do fine." Remus got up. "Come on. I've got time to take you over a few things before my first class."

Harry followed Remus to the library where he found someone he'd never met before. "Harry Sebastian, this is Rupert Giles."

"Harry." Rupert looked a little distracted. "Sorry, I just wanted to borrow a few things."

"Help yourself." Remus told him. "Just let Harry know which books you've taken."

Harry was a little lost. "Does the general public have access to the library as well?"

Remus laughed. "Giles is a watcher. We're storing here what few books we managed to recover when our headquarters were damaged until the Academy is finally finished."

Harry nodded understandingly. "Is there anyone else I should be aware of?"

"You might find one of Giles' friends, Alexander Harris, better known as Xander, in here. He often uses the library when he wants quiet to review his drawings." Remus liked the young man that Giles had brought over from the States when they'd started the building.

"I'll remember that." Harry checked the time. "Look, Remus. I'll probably do better if you leave me to wander around on my own. I can ask if I have any questions."

"Thanks Harry." Remus was about to leave when he decided to do what Frances had suggested. "Harry, I'd be grateful if you could drop by the Academy this Saturday. I'll show you where you're going to be eventually working and give you a quick look around what we've already gotten finished."

"I thought the old building was only destroyed four or so months ago; I didn't expect that anything would be anywhere near finished yet." Harry wanted to find out more.

"Xander is very efficient, as are the men he's chosen to work on the project." Remus gave Harry a brief explanation. "About midday will be fine. If I'm not there, ask for Xander." With that Remus left Harry to his own devices.

Alone, Harry wandered up and down the stacks, making notes until he almost tripped over Giles who was kneeling on the floor, his head in a book. "There are tables for that you know."

Giles jumped. "Sorry. It's normally me telling students that sort of thing."

Harry was confused. "I thought a woman was the librarian before me."

Giles climbed to his feet. "I was a librarian at Buffy's school in California before the high school was destroyed."

"And then Sunnydale was destroyed too, wasn't it?" Harry had read up on as much as he could about the vampire slayer but he hadn't really paid that much attention to everyone else who'd been part of the Sunnydale disaster.

"Unfortunately yes." Giles' concentration was elsewhere and he wasn't really in the mood for discussing Sunnydale.

Harry could tell that his questions were unwelcome, and made his excuses. "If you'll excuse me, I've got things to do."

"Of course." Giles picked up the book and followed Harry out of the stacks. "I'll take this with me."

Harry made a note of the title and watched Giles wander out. After spending two boring hours looking around the library, Harry wondered exactly what he'd let himself in for.

Saturday, 8th September 2002

Harry shook hands with the dark-haired young man who was wearing an eye-patch. "Hi, I'm Harry Sebastian."

"Xander Harris." Xander was pretty busy and didn't really have time to babysit the new librarian until Remus arrived. "You'll have to follow me around as I'm in the middle of something."

"Not a problem." Harry had worn boots and took the hard hat that Xander offered him. "Perhaps you could tell me why this place is being built so close to Hogwarts."

"There are no nasty hellmouths around here, and Hogwarts offers almost unparalleled protection to the Academy." Xander checked over some work that had been done, and gave his recommendations to one of his men.

"Why isn't this place being built with magic?" Harry had never seen Muggles building being erected before except when he was a child.

"Something to do with mystic energy having a deleterious effect on the building." Xander shrugged. "It's all mumbo jumbo to me." Xander stopped for a moment. "Remus said you were American. Yet you're the most British sounding American I've ever come across."

"That's what everyone says." Harry was by now used to the comment. "Either way, it doesn't matter as I'm living over here now. As are you so it would seem."

"I needed a break from being Buffy and Willow's sidekick." Xander could see that the names meant little to Harry. "You do know who they are, don't you?"

"I know who they are." Harry wasn't really that interested in the two women. "So you were their sidekick?"

"That's one way of putting it." Xander sounded a little bitter.

Harry was aware of how some of his men had felt constantly being sidelined during the jobs they'd done with him, and he had a feeling that Xander felt the same way. "I always thought that the sidekick was always the most important part of the team."

Deciding that he liked the young man, Xander grinned at Harry. "I'm glad you recognize that fact."

He didn't get any further in their discussion as a young woman ran up to him. "Xander, I didn't realize you had someone with you."

Xander smiled at the petite dark-skinned girl. "Well now you can see that I do. I'm babysitting him while we wait for Remus. Harry Sebastian, this is Aditi Nessa. She is the Watcher Liaison for South Asia. Her father is Salik Karim, the South Asian envoy at the Ministry. She's also a witch and a former Hogwarts Alumnae."

Aditi held out her hand. "Hello, Mr. Sebastian."

"Please call me Harry." Harry was almost reluctant to shake hands with the young woman who resembled the Death Eater who had sent his birth mother to her death but knew that he couldn't judge this woman on her counterpart's actions. Smiling he gave her a hand a brief shake before letting it go. "What form of address would you prefer?"

"Aditi will do just fine, Harry." Aditi turned to Xander. "If you want to get back to work, I'll take him from here."

Harry thanked Xander, shook hands with him and followed Aditi. "So how long have you been part of the Watchers' Council?"

"About four years but up until recently my involvement was purely as a freelance advisor, which is why the First didn't bother to track me down. I was also very lucky that I was abroad on personal business when the London building was destroyed in March." Aditi knew how blessed she had been.

Aware that he shouldn't really jump to conclusions, but doing so anyway, Harry wondered if the personal business had anything to do with Voldemort. "I expect your family were relieved that you were out of the country."

Aditi smiled as she opened a door leading to a very long corridor, lined on either side with framed out rooms that were still open to the elements. "They were."

"Xander said you were a Hogwarts Alumnae; I would have thought you would have attended school in your home country." Harry couldn't resist fishing a little for information on the girl.

Aditi filled him in on a little of her background. "I'm the only one of my siblings who attended Hogwarts. I have two sisters and three brothers, and the girls attended the Magundi school in Barisal. However, my brothers attended the Indrajala Academy in Khulna. My youngest brother, Balaruna teaches there now."

"They're two of the best schools in Asia. Why didn't you want to go there?" Even though he wanted information, Harry hoped he wasn't asking anything too personal.

"I am the youngest and my parents wanted me to travel with them. As my father was based in London, we chose Hogwarts over Beauxbatons." Aditi gave an explanation before holding out her hand to encompass the massive framed out room they'd just walked into. "This is going to be your domain, Harry."

Harry looked around the large expanse. "It's a little difficult to imagine it as a library right now."

"I said exactly the same." Remus appeared behind them. "Hi Aditi. Xander said you'd brought him this way."

"Remus." Aditi gave a small bow of her head and exited back the way she'd brought Harry.

"So what do you think?" Remus began walking in the opposite direction to Aditi. "I'll show you some of the parts that have been finished, including my office."

After spending an hour or so looking around, Remus led Harry into his office and Harry sat down. "Would you normally give so much attention to new employees?"

Remus shook his head. "No, not normally but as you're a colleague at Hogwarts, I thought I would do the honors. So now that you're all settled, any questions?"

Harry had. "Yes. Why did you get the head position of the Watchers' Council, and not Rupert Giles? I've read a little of the rumors but even then there isn't much to go by. If you don't mind me asking, that is."

"I don't." Remus had had quite a few people express the same sentiment. "Rupert didn't want the job. He enjoys pure research, and while he will profess to liking paperwork, even he didn't want to handle this. My father was an integral part of the Council, so when the various entities, who hadn't been wiped out by the First and who still wanted contacted with the Council, got together the position was offered to me. I think it also helps that I have a lot of records and papers that Dad had copied and collected at my home."

"Did you train as a Watcher?" Harry found that he was interested in what this Remus had done with his life.

"I started to but decided against it after a few years." Remus had at first thought he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps but had soon become disillusioned. "I then trained as a teacher which is why I now find myself splitting my time between Hogwarts and the Council."

"Why not just leave Hogwarts?" Harry thought that Remus was insane to take on both jobs.

"I have a ten year magical contract, and I have to provide some form of teaching services until that contract is up." Remus explained. "That is why Lily took over a few years ago when things started to get a little hairy at the Council, and Dad asked me to reconsider my previous decision."

"Is your Dad still alive?" Harry was almost reluctant to ask.

Remus' face became sad. "He was killed in the explosion."

"I'm so sorry." Harry knew how he'd felt when he'd lost Remus in his world.

"Thank you." Not wanting to dwell on his Dad, Remus changed the subject. "I asked you to come here, not only to show you the Academy, but to discuss a few things with you."

"I'm all ears." Harry waited for Remus to explain what he wanted.

"You are friends with Mione Dominic, aren't you?" Remus watched Harry's face take on a somewhat concerned look.

"I am." Harry wondered what Remus wanted with Mione.

"I've only taken her for three lessons so far, but even I can see that her skill level is almost what my own is. I was wondering whether you know if she would be amenable to accepting a class assistant position in Defense. I don't want to approach her if I'm wasting my time, and she decides after a few weeks that she can't deal with it." Remus really didn't have time to spare messing around. "I'm not going to offer her the position just yet though. I thought I'd give it a few more weeks just to see if my first impressions are correct, so I'd appreciate it if you didn't mention this to her."

Harry knew that Mione would rip his head off if he said no. "I won't say anything, but I know she'd jump at such an offer. What about her other school work?"

"I was going to see how she fared over several months. If it works out, I was going to see if she felt up to taking her exams at Christmas, and expanding the role." Remus really did need the help and had originally intended to offer the position to Cassandra Black as the best student in the school, but Mione had a far more confident air about her, and so far her work had easily surpassed Cassandra's.

"I think you can safely approach her when you're ready to as I can't see her saying no, and I can guarantee you that she won't change her mind once she's said yes." Harry hid his smile as he imagined that Mione would drive Remus to the brink of madness with all of the

questions Harry knew she'd have for the man. "Was that everything you wanted to discuss?"

Remus shook his head. "I should have asked you during your interview if there was anything you wanted to share with me."

"I beg your pardon." Harry didn't quite follow where Remus was going.

"As in, do you have any secrets you'd like to share?" Remus couldn't resist playing a little with Harry.

"No, why would you ask that?" Harry wondered if Remus had figured out that he and the others weren't exactly from America as they'd claimed.

"Because I'm pretty certain that you're hiding something from me." Remus was surprised at the poise Harry was showing for someone his age, as the young man didn't fidget or drop his eyes, as many would in the same situation.

"I think you'd better just come out and tell me whatever it is that you think I'm hiding." Harry wasn't going to reveal anything voluntarily.

"Do you know when the next full moon is, Harry?" Remus asked quietly.

Harry felt his stomach drop but kept a calm exterior. "Perhaps you'd like to tell me why I would."

Remus finished playing games. "I know you're a werewolf, Harry."

Harry wondered how Remus could have known. "And if I am; what of it?"

"I can offer you a potion to help with the pain." Remus wasn't going to reveal the potion that would mask what Harry was, as he didn't know Harry well enough to trust him with his own secret just yet.

"Why?" Harry knew that with only a few vials of Wolfsbane in his trunk, he was either going to have ask Mione to make more, or he was

going to have to find somewhere safer than his rooms to lock himself up.

“Because I have a friend who suffers from the same affliction you do. He thought he’d found an answer to his change through meditation but the effects were only temporary and are somewhat unstable if he’s upset. He more often than not changes now and to cope with the pain takes the potion I can get for him.”

“And you’re willing to help me?” Harry was a little suspicious of Remus’ motives. “Most people would simply report me to the Ministry.”

“I’ve seen firsthand how this curse affects people, Harry.” Remus knew that Harry didn’t trust him. “I can help you if you let me. The potion will help with the next day pains and the pain of the transformation but I’m afraid you’re still likely to injure yourself during the transformation itself.”

Harry realized that Remus was being genuine, and made a snap decision. “You really do care about your friend, don’t you?”

Remus nodded. “He’s a decent guy who only got turned because his baby nephew, who’s a natural werewolf, bit him when my friend was feeding him.”

“That’s harsh.” Harry had no idea what a natural werewolf was but hid the fact from Remus.

“It’s a harsh world, Harry.” Remus leant forward. “So do you want the potion?”

Harry knew that he couldn’t in good conscience take the offer without offering something in return. “Will it help me keep my mind?”

“What?” Remus was astounded by the question.

“I take it that’s a no then.” Harry looked assessingly at Remus. “In which case I might have something to offer your friend.”

Remus raised an eyebrow. "And that is?"

"A potion called Wolfsbane. It helps a little with the pain but its main function is that it allows a werewolf to retain a sense of who he is." Harry could see that Remus was very interested.

Harry was right. "Who developed it?"

"I can't tell you that but if I can get the ingredients and somewhere to make it, I know someone who can manufacture it for your friend." Harry hoped that the chance he was taking was worth it.

"That would be..." Remus was cut off as a knock sounded at the door. "Come in."

Aditi slipped into the room and closed the door behind her. "I'm sorry to disturb you, Remus but Thomas Seville is waiting to speak to you."

Remus frowned. "What is Thomas doing here?"

"I told him you'd be here today." Aditi looked a little uncomfortable. "I ran into him in London a few days ago; he expressed an interest in seeing how things were coming along."

"That's fine." Remus stood up. "I'm sorry to cut this short, Harry but Thomas Seville is the largest private investor in this building, and I can't just leave him waiting."

"That's no problem, Remus." Harry also stood up. "I'll speak to you when you're free again."

"I'll let you know what my friend thinks, and get back to you." Remus led the way to the door, and called out to the dark-haired man who stood patiently waiting. "Thomas, sorry to have kept you but I was just giving our new librarian the rundown on this place."

Thomas Seville walked over to Remus and shook his hand. "I hope it's not a problem my dropping by unannounced."

“Not at all.” Remus stepped aside so that Thomas could enter the office. “By the way, this is Harry Sebastian the new librarian. He's currently serving solely at Hogwarts until this place has been finished.”

“Thomas Seville.” Thomas shook hands with Harry. “I expect you're looking forward to getting things moving.”

“I am.” Harry gave Thomas a brief smile, and nodded at Remus. “If you'll both excuse me, I'll leave you two to your business.”

Remus turned to Aditi. “Will you show Harry out?”

“Of course.” Aditi led Harry away as Remus closed the office door behind himself and Thomas. “Are you alright? You look a little pale.”

“Just a muscle twinge.” Harry rubbed the back of his neck. However, by the time they'd reach the long corridor again, Harry was feeling better. “I think I can find my way back from here. Thank you.”

“You're welcome.” Aditi shook hands with Harry and headed back the way she'd come from.

Harry waved at Xander on his way out and placed his hard hat where he'd found it, before heading back to the school. Once he reached the rooms he shared with H.J., he called out. “H.J. are you in?”

Not getting a reply, Harry turned to go and check out the flying field, only to find a note with his name on it sitting on the table by the door. Unfolding it, Harry swore as he read it. “The bloody idiot.”

Opening the door and breaking into a run, Harry headed for the girls' toilet on the second floor. Finding the sink was sealed, he hissed “Open” and “Stairs” at it before closing it and heading down into the abyss. Cursing H.J., Harry heard a noise and made his way into the inner chamber. “H.J. is that you?”

H.J. was both relieved and annoyed at the sound of Harry's voice. “No, it's Voldemort. Of course it's me.”

"Where's the Basilisk?" Harry listened carefully but couldn't hear anything.

"I don't know." H.J. called back. "But I think it went after my rooster."

"You were supposed to wait for me to come back." Harry strode into the main section of the chamber to find H.J. lying against the base of a statue of Slytherin, a bone sticking out from his leg. "What did you do?"

"Slipped, and the damage is a little too extensive to slap on a field dressing spell." H.J. looked up at Harry. "If the Basilisk isn't in here, then where is it?"

"I have no idea." Harry snapped as he looked at the damage that H.J. had done to himself.

"You did close the outside door, didn't you?" H.J. had visions of the Basilisk roaming around the school.

"Unlike you, I'm not completely stupid." Harry cast Mobilicorpus on H.J. "Let's get you out of here." Harry hadn't even moved H.J. more than two feet when his hearing picked up the sound of the Basilisk returning. "Now we're in trouble."

Harry scanned the cavern and spotting a high ledge near the top of the cavern, he levitated H.J. upwards until he was resting on it. "Now close your eyes and don't move."

"Harry, you bastard, let me down." H.J. knew that he couldn't get himself back down very easily without Harry's help. He could cast a cushioning charm and drop but knew that it wouldn't do his leg much good.

"Just shut up and do as someone tells you for once." Harry wasn't very happy about having to face a Basilisk. He knew that H.J. had beaten the one in his world during his second year but even as an adult, Harry really didn't want to face it, especially as he had no Fawkes to help out.

H.J. fell silent as he realized that Harry would need his wits about him to survive. Unable to look, he settled down the ledge and waited for the inevitable confrontation.

Next chapter: We find out how H.J. injured himself; H.J. does a deal with Severus; Harry talks more with Remus; Remus makes Mione an offer.

Chapter 7: Telling the Truth

Thomas Seville shook hands with Remus and left to find Aditi waiting for him. "Are you here to make sure I leave?"

Aditi laughed. "No, just to make sure you can find your way out."

"In that case, thank you." Thomas held out his arm for Aditi to take. "Have you decided on whether to accept my offer?"

"I'm still thinking about it." Aditi was in no hurry to make up her mind. "When do you require an answer by?"

"The first meeting is set for December 10th, so any time before then would be appreciated." Thomas handed her a coin. "If you need to speak to me, give this to your owl, and I'll contact you."

"You really are quite elusive, aren't you?" Aditi was quite intrigued by the man.

"I simply value my privacy." Thomas reached the edge of the building. "I'll be fine from here." Thomas looked over at Hogwarts. "It's supposed to be the best wizarding school in Europe, isn't it?"

"I think it is, then again, I attended it." Aditi glanced over at her old school. "But I suppose everyone is prejudiced towards their alma mater, aren't they?"

"I would say so." Thomas turned away. "I'll wait to hear from you."

"I'll be in touch either way." Aditi promised before turning to go back into the building.

Thomas made his way to the edge of the wards and apparated out.

Hogwarts

Mione wandered up to Harry's room, and knocked on the door. Getting no answer she unlocked it, and went inside. "Harry, H.J."

When no-one answered, she turned and headed to leave, only to spot a piece of paper lying on the floor. Picking it up, she saw Harry's name on the outside of it, and, curiosity getting the better of her, read the note. It was a good job she did. "The bloody idiots; did neither of them read the Defense books I told them to?"

Mione scanned the room and found a glass which she turned into a mirror, and grabbed a sweater of Harry's. Dashing out of the room she headed for the girls' bathroom at the far end of the corridor. Dashing in she was about to open the sink when she realized that someone else was in the bathroom. As the toilet flushed and a door opened, she found herself face to face with Cassandra Black. "Cassandra, what are you doing in here?"

Washing her hands, Cassandra looked at Mione as if she had taken leave of her senses. "It's the girls' bathroom, Mione. What do you think I'm doing in here?"

"Yes, err, right." Mione waited for Cassandra to leave.

She didn't. "Why are you holding a mirror and a sweater?"

"I'm cold and wanted to check my reflection." Mione groaned. "That sounded pathetic, didn't it?"

"Yes." Cassandra closed the outside door. "You weren't thinking of hurting yourself were you?"

"Not deliberately no." Mione glanced over at the sink on the far wall.

"Mione, what's going on?" Cassandra wasn't leaving until she found out what Mione was doing.

Mione had a feeling that time wasn't on her side, and she knew that she was going to have to reveal the Chamber to Cassandra. "Promise me that whatever you see from now on, you'll keep to yourself."

"I promise." Cassandra wondered what it could be.

Mione walked over to the sink and hissed at it, revealing a hole and a set of stairs. "I think you might do better staying here."

"What's down there?" Cassandra went to peer down into the hole, only for Mione to pull her back.

"Don't do that." Mione snapped. "There's probably a basilisk down there."

Cassandra scooted back hurriedly. "A basilisk?"

"Yes, and Harry and H.J. are down there with it." Suddenly Mione realized something. "You didn't even flinch when I spoke in parseltongue."

"What's parseltongue?" Cassandra had never heard of it before.

"It doesn't matter." Mione listened. "I think it's safe. Stay here."

"No way." Cassandra followed Mione down the stairs.

When they reached the bottom, Mione listened again. "I can't hear anything."

"That's good, isn't it?" Even though the cavern was quite cool, Cassandra could feel sweat beginning to bead on her forehead.

"It could go either way." Mione made her way to the section where the inner door stood open. "That's not good." Suddenly a slithering sound reached Mione's ears. "Close your eyes now."

Cassandra did as she was told as Mione threw Harry's jumper onto the ground and hurried to transfigure it into a weasel. The weasel didn't stay in the cavern with Mione and Cassandra; as soon as it scented the basilisk, it gave an excited squeal and rushed into the main chamber. Mione called out. "Harry, H.J. Don't kill the weasel."

Sounds of screaming and a nasty smell of ammonia drifted their way before everything went silent. Cassandra was worried. "Do you think the basilisk is dead?"

"I hope so." Mione lifted the mirror and looked into it. In it she could see a reflection of the basilisk's tail but no movement. "Let me just cast a spell to cover the basilisk over. I don't know if its eyes are closed. *Nebulosus Aspergo*."

A thin stream of vapor left Mione's wand and blanketed the basilisk's body in a dense, impenetrable layer of fog. Cassandra let out a sigh of relief.

Mione knew it was now or never. "Let's go." The young women walked carefully into the cavern, their wands drawn. Mione immediately spotted Harry. "Oh no." Rushing over, she checked him over before letting out a sigh of relief. "He's just petrified."

"Petrified?" Cassandra had thought he was dead. "I thought making eye contact with a basilisk would kill you."

H.J.'s voice drifted down from the upper regions of the cavern. "I'm glad to see you two. Harry was trying to fight it without looking at it but after a while everything went quiet. I risked a glance and saw that he wasn't moving. I don't know how he ended up petrified though as I couldn't look."

"H.J. Did you ever bother to read the defense books I got for you?" Mione stood with her hands on her hips.

H.J. knew he was going to get it. "No. I just didn't have time."

"If you had bothered, then you'd have discovered that basilisks in this world can only be killed by a weasel and not a rooster." Mione turned to Cassandra. "I can see from your face that you're a little confused."

"That's quite the understatement." Cassandra was also intrigued. "So what do we do now?"

"H.J. Why are you up there?" Mione couldn't see the injury he'd sustained.

"My leg's broken. Harry levitated me up out of the way." H.J. looked down at the large drop. "I could use cushioning charms to get down but I don't want to risk it, so I'd appreciate a little help."

At H.J.'s words, Mione and Cassandra both cast cushioning charms before aiming their wands at H.J. "On the count of three, Cassandra and I will levitate you down. We've put down cushioning charms just in case. One, two, three."

H.J. braced himself as he lifted up and over the drop. The two girls however got him to the ground without any problems.

"We're going to have to get you back to your rooms somehow." Mione knew how it would look trailing H.J. along the corridor and up several flights of stairs.

"We'll take him back to our suite; it's only at the end of corridor." Cassandra offered.

"Are you sure?" Mione had only been friends with Cassandra for a short time, and even though it felt much longer, she didn't want to take advantage of her friend.

"I am." Cassandra looked at Harry. "How do we deal with Harry?"

"Let's get H.J. dealt with first. Harry will be fine." Mione knew that Mandrake juice would cure him; she just had to locate some mature Mandrakes.

Between them the two girls managed to get H.J. to the top of the stairs and out into the corridor. Both girls let out a sigh of relief as they opened to their suite and maneuvered H.J. inside.

Luna and Katherine got to their feet at the sight of the assistant flying assistant with a bone sticking out of his leg. Katherine went green and fled. Luna, however, simply rearranged the pillows on the sofa. "Put him here." She then turned to Mione. "I told you you'd need our help."

H.J. couldn't take his eyes off Luna. Somehow she looked even more like his own Luna than the Luna he'd met in the alternate timeline. "And we do. I'm going to need a few things." H.J. reeled off what he'd need.

Cassandra was astounded. "You're going to heal your own leg?"

"Yes but to do it, I'm going to have to vanish my bone and regrow it." H.J. wasn't confident enough to try and realign it on his own.

Cassandra shuddered; she'd taken Skele-Gro as a first year when she'd shattered her hipbone falling down the stairs. "I know where Madam Pomfrey keeps it, or at least I did. But I'll need help in distracting her."

"I'll go with you." Mione offered. "I can say I'm interested in healing. She doesn't know me well enough to know it isn't true."

"Let's go then." Cassandra headed out of the door with Mione, leaving Luna and H.J. alone. Katherine remained in the bedroom waiting until someone told her it was all over.

Luna tilted her head and looked at H.J. "Why were you staring at me?"

"You remind me of someone." H.J. winced as the pain in his leg was getting worse.

"You're wearing some sort of glamour aren't you?" Luna's look was quite penetrating.

"Yes." H.J. didn't want to lie to Luna.

"I thought so. Your aura looks wrong." Luna commented. "Mione's is very similar. It's almost as if they're vibrating."

H.J. groaned. "Please don't tell me you believe in auras and all that divination crap."

"Of course I do." Luna was looking at H.J. as if he was mad.

"I was hoping that you might be different." H.J.'s wife had been adamant that divination was a true science; it had been on the few things they'd ever argued about. He'd been able to deal with her 'feelings' about things but refusing to believe in divination had just put them down to Luna being Luna.

"Different from whom or what?" Luna sat on the floor and crossed her legs, before looking up at H.J.

"Now's not the right time." H.J. smiled. "But I'll show you at some point."

"How?" Luna asked interestedly.

It was H.J.'s turn to look at Luna quizzically. "In a pensieve of course."

"But they're illegal." Luna answered matter of factly. "They're considered a violation of privacy."

H.J. was shocked. "But they just hold memories."

"But if used wrongly they can be an intrusion of privacy." Luna pointed out.

"Not if the memory is freely shown." H.J. felt himself cringing at the thought of what he'd done to Severus. He'd felt nothing but disgust for his birth father when he'd seen James belittle Severus in the memories that Severus had hidden from him.

Luna easily read H.J.'s expression. "Did you look at someone's memories when you shouldn't have?"

H.J. couldn't see any reason to hide it, and told Luna what he'd done. "I felt so guilty afterwards but the temptation was too great. I wanted to see what my teacher was hiding from me."

"Do you regret doing it now?" Luna asked quietly.

“No.” H.J. didn’t. “It was because of that moment that things changed between my teacher and myself.”

“You look sad.” Luna stood up and took H.J.’s hand making him shiver.

H.J. squeezed Luna’s hand gently. “That’s because I miss him.”

“When you’re ready, you’ll talk to me about it.” Luna was confident in her statement.

“I will.” H.J. promised.

At that moment, the outside door opened and Cassandra and Mione stepped back inside. Cassandra’s face fell momentarily at the sight of Luna and H.J. holding hands before she gave a bright smile, and held up the bottle of Skele-Gro. “We’ve got what you wanted.”

Mione also held out pain relief potion and antiseptic cream. “I told Madam Pomfrey that Luna had cut herself, and that I’d deal with it.” She smiled apologetically at Luna. “I hope you don’t mind.”

“Not at all.” Luna let go of H.J.’s hand. “I’ll fetch a glass.”

H.J. shook his head. “I can’t take painkiller and Skele-Gro together, but thanks anyway.”

Despite not being able to take the potion, after vanishing his bone and cleaning up the cut, H.J. felt a little better. He looked up at Mione from his place on the sofa. “Don’t you think you’d better retrieve Harry?”

Mione went red. “I’d forgotten about him.”

Cassandra smiled at her friend. “You’ve already said he was going to be alright.”

“I’d still better go fetch him.” Mione headed towards the door.

Luna followed her. “Where are we going?”

Cassandra grinned. "You'll see."

The three girls went out and H.J. lay back. He glanced over at the bedroom door as he heard the handle turn. "You can come out now, Katherine."

Katherine looked a little sheepish as she re-entered the sitting room. "Sorry, but I'm not very good around blood."

"It's okay." H.J. could see she was dying to ask. "Before you ask, I did it when I slipped trying to escape from a basilisk."

Katherine laughed out loud as she sat down. "Of course you did."

H.J. hadn't expected her to believe him. "Wait until the others get back, and we'll tell you all about it."

Katherine studied his face carefully. "You come out with a statement like that, and expect me to wait to hear all about it?"

H.J. recognized sarcasm when he heard it. "You're going to be in for a shock."

The door flew open and Harry was levitated inside the room. Katherine stood up in shock. "What's happened to Mr. Sebastian?"

"He's been petrified." Luna's face was alight with excitement. "There's a cavern beneath the school and a dead basilisk."

Katherine swung round to look at H.J. "You were telling the truth."

"I try not to lie unless it's necessary." H.J. was enjoying the surprise on Katherine's face. "Now, we need to do a little oath taking."

All three of that world's girls went silent. Cassandra was the one who took point. "When you mentioned a different world, you meant it, didn't you? You're not really from the US are you?"

Mione shook her head. "We're not, but we don't want to tell you more until we get oaths from you not to tell anyone what has happened today, unless we give you permission to do so."

"Mione, what happens when you swear an oath where you come from?" Katherine asked.

"You die if you break it." Mione answered.

"The same happens here, but when you take the oath, it feels as if you are being torn apart." Katherine knew from experience; Harry had once tricked her into making an oath; something her brother had regretted when for the first time ever, their Dad had spanked his son for his stupidity.

"It's not like that where we come from." Mione explained. "A white light covers you and washes over you, a little like being submerged in a quick warm shower."

"I'll do it." Luna offered.

Katherine's voice was a little shaky. "So will I then."

"As will I." Cassandra could hear her own voice shaking. "I think doing it together might be a good idea."

Mione stopped them. "We may have a better option."

H.J. frowned. "What option?"

"The Fidelius." Mione suggested. "Or a simple promise. I trust the girls, H.J."

Luna beamed at Mione. "Thanks for the confidence." She then surprised everyone by going ahead and making a vow anyway. "I swear on my life and my magic to keep your secrets unless you say otherwise."

Cassandra grabbed Luna as she crumpled to the ground. "You could have warned us."

Luna had tears in her eyes. "Ouch."

H.J. was shocked at how pale she had gone, and lifted up the flagon which contained the pain potion. "Take some of this."

Mione took it from him as he wasn't able to move very far and poured some into a fresh glass before passing it to Luna. "You really didn't have to do that."

"I know but it felt right." Luna rarely went against her inner feelings, and this time had been no different.

"I am so not looking forward to this." Cassandra pulled out her own wand and repeated the same oath as Luna had. Both Katherine and Mione grabbed her as her legs gave way.

Mione handed out the second dose of pain killer which Cassandra gratefully took. After waiting a few minutes until Luna and Cassandra had both fully recovered, Katherine gritted her teeth and followed suit.

Mione fixed everyone drinks in the small kitchenette and handed them around. She could see Luna giving Harry little glances every now and then. "He'll be alright. I just need to access some mature mandrakes."

"Professor Snape will probably have some." Katherine's dislike of her stepfather came through in her tone. "But I don't know how you're going to get some without his asking some difficult questions."

"I have something he wants." H.J. knew that he could get whatever he needed from Severus, if he was willing to barter a little of the basilisk.

Cassandra knew what the something was. "So how did you know that thing was down there?"

"As I've already said, I'm not from this world." Mione could see the skepticism in Katherine's face. "I can see you don't believe me."

Mione remained seated and pulled out her wand. "I swear what I am about to tell you today is the truth."

Mione didn't even flinch as she was bathed in white light and it dissipated. "H.J. Your turn."

H.J. pulled out his wand. As he made the oath, pain ripped through him making him glad he was lying down. "That hurt."

Mione couldn't give him any painkiller. "Sorry H.J."

Katherine stared at Mione. "You must be like Uncle Remus. It doesn't affect him either."

H.J. suddenly remembered Remus swearing an oath at the Dursleys. "That's why I never thought anything about it; I saw him swear an oath when we collected Camellia."

"Is it true you're adopting her?" Luna had heard the rumors.

"Yes. Her parents have refused to have anything to do with her because she came here." H.J. began to explain.

"I thought she was a half-blood, or at least that's what I've heard." Katherine piped up.

H.J. frowned. "Don't you know who Camellia is?"

"What do you mean?" Katherine didn't understand why H.J. was asking.

"She's your aunt's daughter." H.J. could see that Katherine was confused by his comment.

"Don't you know about your mother's sister?" Mione found it hard to believe that Katherine knew nothing about Petunia.

Katherine was now even more confused. "Petunia died years ago."

"No, she didn't." H.J. informed her. "She's married to a man called Vernon Dursley. They have two children; Dudley, who's a complete waste of space, and Camellia. Petunia and Vernon had been mistreating Camellia because she's magical. Your aunt, however, is a squib."

Katherine was reeling. "Why didn't Mum or Dad tell me?"

"I don't know." Mione said gently. "But Camellia is your cousin."

"Mum must have known I'd find out about her." Katherine shook her head. "I know you're telling the truth but it's so hard to learn about it like this."

"I believe your Mum thought you'd never find out. You'd never have connected Camellia Dursley to yourself." Mione sensibly pointed out.

Something occurred to Katherine. "Why didn't Mum offer to take her?"

"I think Severus had a lot to do with it." H.J. wasn't totally sure though of Lily's reasons.

"I want to meet her." Katherine found that as the initial shock was fading, she was quite excited at learning she'd got a magical cousin. "I don't care what Mum or Severus says."

"I'm sure Camellia would like that." H.J. had spoken to the young girl on several occasions since collecting her, including the time he'd asked if she'd like to be adopted by him. "I think she's feeling a little lonely and lost right now."

Cassandra knew that Orion was quite a soft touch. "I can ask Orion to keep an eye on her." Camellia had been sorted into Orion's house of Hufflepuff.

"What's happened to her parents?" Luna asked. "I don't know about where you come from, but here it's a death sentence if you assault a pureblood or half-blood child."

Mione had a vague recollection of reading something about it. "If that's true, why is your Voldemort still alive?"

"He never hurt a pureblood or halfblood child during his campaign." Cassandra informed her.

"But he must have killed purebloods and halfbloods." Mione protested.

"The same law doesn't apply to adults; just children under the age of eighteen." Cassandra knew more about Voldemort than her suite mates.

"So does the law apply to muggles and muggleborns if they're harmed?" Mione asked.

"No." With Sirius being who he was, Cassandra was quite au fait with the laws of the wizarding world.

H.J. had found out the previous evening what had happened to the Dursleys. "Getting back to Camellia's parents; Vernon and Petunia are both in Azkaban. Camellia pleaded on their behalf. Neither of them will be executed but they'll both spend the rest of their lives there."

"What about Dudley?" Mione asked.

"He was deemed innocent of doing anything wrong as he had had no idea that Camellia was a witch. It was his parents' influence that caused him to reject Camellia. He's gone to live with Vernon's sister but has to see a wizarding psychologist on a regular basis." H.J. gave a shudder at the thought of Marge.

Katherine by now had fallen silent again as she dealt with the repercussions of what she'd found out. Cassandra put her arm around Katherine and pulled her close to her. "We'll invite her here. You can meet her in private then."

Katherine gave Cassandra a small smile. "Thanks."

Luna decided to get back onto what she really wanted to know. “So, let’s hear about how you know about the cavern beneath the school.”

It was almost midnight when H.J. and Mione finished explaining. They’d taken several breaks to eat and for H.J. to send a note to Severus requesting a meeting the next morning; a response to it had been received within an hour.

All three girls were still trying to assimilate the knowledge they’d learnt and felt exhausted. Cassandra yawned. “I’d never have believed you if you hadn’t sworn that you were telling the truth.”

“It is fantastical I know.” Mione felt completely drained.

“I can’t believe that your version of Dad was so horrible.” Cassandra thought the world of Sirius. “Dad would never betray us like that.”

“Harry believed the same of his Sirius.” Mione knew that Harry had been devastated to find out that Sirius wasn’t what he’d portrayed. “But on the other hand, H.J.’s Sirius is probably closer to being like your Dad. I mean, he died to save H.J.”

“Dad would do the same for any one of us.” Cassandra stared at Mione. “It’s strange to think that in your world you were my half-sister.”

“I never considered Sirius my father.” Mione felt her emotions bubbling over as she thought about Severus. “Papa was my true father.”

“That’s something I find hard to comprehend; Snivellus actually being nice.” Katherine really did loathe her stepfather. “I think I feel about him the way you felt about Uncle Sirius.”

“Do you think we can trust Severus?” Despite Katherine’s dislike of Severus, H.J. still wanted to believe that he could trust Severus.

“No.” It was Cassandra who answered him. “I shouldn’t really tell you this but after what you’ve told us, you need to know. Dad had him investigated when Voldemort was trying to take over. Dad managed

to find out where one of the meetings Voldemort was holding was to take place. He and two of his men followed a random Death Eater after the meeting. They followed the Death Eater all the way back to the Snape Estate. Dad got a warrant and Professor Snape was arrested.”

“So why isn’t Severus in Azkaban?” Mione couldn’t see how Severus had wriggled out of being convicted.

“Because when Dad questioned him under Veritaserum, Professor Snape swore he’d not been there that evening.” Cassandra explained.

“In my world Death Eaters are almost invulnerable to Veritaserum. It might be the same here.” Mione suggested.

It made sense to Cassandra. “Either way it doesn’t matter now. Professor Snape was found to be innocent of any wrongdoing but I still don’t think he was telling the truth.”

“So Severus has to be out, H.J.” Mione knew that they couldn’t take the risk.

“I agree.” H.J. sighed. “But I still need him to sell the basilisk parts.”

“If you need cash, I’ve got a trust fund you can access.” Luna offered. “You can simply pay me back when you have the money.”

“That’s very kind of you.” H.J. thanked the young girl. “But if basilisk is as expensive here as it is back home, then we’re going to make a tidy sum.”

“It’s very rare.” Cassandra informed him. “Particularly the skin, which can be used in armor. I know because Dad has a jacket made out of it. It cost him a fortune.”

Mione glanced at H.J. who guessed what she was about to do, and simply nodded. “We’ll give your Dad enough to make another jacket, if you’d like.”

Cassandra smiled and shook her head. "That won't be necessary. Basilisk skin doesn't wear out."

Mione remembered what Cassandra had told her about becoming an auror herself. "In that case, perhaps you'd like a jacket."

"Really?" Cassandra couldn't believe that Mione was offering her. "A jacket sells for 150,000 galleons."

"You're joking, right?" Mione couldn't believe how much a jacket would cost; it was almost five times as expensive as the same would be where she'd come from.

"No." Cassandra shook her head. "You might want to reconsider your offer."

"We don't." H.J. reassured her. "The same offer is open to you two girls as well."

"Thank you." Katherine was astounded at the offer. "I'd be mad to refuse."

Cassandra got up. "I'm off to bed. I need some sleep. We can talk more again in the morning."

Katherine and Mione both followed suit, leaving H.J. alone with Luna for the second time that day.

H.J. turned his attention to Luna. "So now you know why I was staring at you earlier."

"I do." Luna played with her hair a little nervously.

"Luna, I know you're not her." H.J. didn't want to think that Luna thought otherwise. "I admit I was attracted to the Luna in the alternate timeline but I think it's because essentially she was the same Luna I married."

"But I'm not." Luna gave a slightly sad smile. "I certainly don't expect you to be attracted to me. No-one ever is."

"I thought Orion had a thing for you." Mione had told H.J. when he'd asked about Luna.

"He does but I know he's not the one for me." Luna didn't know who was, but she knew that it wasn't Orion. "Don't ask me how I know, I just do."

"My Luna was the same." H.J. smiled as he thought about his wife. "She told me after we were married that she just knew she was going to marry me the first time she set eyes on me."

"She sounds as if she was nice." Luna had to admit to herself that she was more than a little curious about the alternate Luna H.J. had been married to.

"She was, and she was also the most important thing in the world to me." H.J. closed his eyes momentarily as he pictured Luna in his mind. "And you're going to tell me now, that like Orion, I'm not meant to be with you."

"I thought you didn't believe in divination." Luna gave an impish smile before turning serious. "You're right. I know we're going to be friends but again, I know that you aren't supposed to be with me."

"I think that perhaps my Luna is the only one I was meant to be with." H.J. sat tentatively up and stretched his leg as he spoke.

Luna disagreed. "I don't believe that. I somehow know you're going to be happy one day."

"I glad you think so." H.J. couldn't quite bring himself to believe what Luna was telling him. "But I have more important things to deal with than my happiness."

"You mean your Voldemort, don't you?" Luna asked.

"Yes." H.J. got to his feet, relieved when his leg, even though still tender, didn't give way. "He's out there somewhere but I just don't know where."

“Perhaps he’s decided to make the most of his second chance.” Luna suggested.

H.J. shook his head. “No. The Fates said otherwise, and as much as I hate to admit it, I believe them.”

“In that case, we’ll all help you.” Luna offered. “You’ll have problems tracking down information in this world. Our newspapers aren’t allowed to print a lot of things but Cassandra knows a lot. I think you can’t go wrong with trusting her Dad.”

“We don’t know Sirius that well, and after the Amicus debacle, we’re a little dubious about just simply trusting someone like Sirius.” H.J. started to walk towards the door. “I think I’d better head off to bed.”

“Sleep on the sofa.” Luna walked over to the girls’ bedroom and poked her head around the door. “Everyone’s in bed, so you can go in and use the bathroom.”

H.J. decided he didn't really fancy the walk back to his own rooms, and did as Luna suggested before returning to the sofa, where he found that Luna had fetched some spare blankets and pillows for him. “At least I’ll have company.”

Luna glanced at the frozen figure of Harry that was propped up against the wall. “It’s hard to believe that that’s Mr. Sebastian.”

“Trust me; it’s Harry.” H.J. yawned. “He’ll tell you himself once we get the Mandrakes and brew what we need. Mione can set up a potions lab in the chamber.”

“I’m looking forward to talking to Mr. Sebastian.” Luna gave Harry another glance.

“You like him, don’t you?” H.J. suddenly realized.

Luna blushed. “I think he’s really nice; well from the two times he’s helped me in the library, I do. But I also know that I’d never do

anything to hurt Mione by trying anything, and besides he's practically a teacher."

H.J. felt a little saddened that Luna didn't see him that way. "I think you'd better get some sleep and I'll see you in the morning."

"Goodnight, H.J." Luna impulsively kissed him on the cheek. "Sleep well."

H.J. touched his cheek before lowering himself carefully onto the sofa and dousing the lights.

I've split this chapter into two because of its length. I should post the other half within a few days. What was chapter 8, and is now 9, will hopefully follow a few days after that.

Chapter 8: Prejudice

The Next Morning

H.J. headed towards the potions classroom. After entering the room, H.J. found Severus waiting for him. "Good morning, Professor."

"Mr. Sebastian." Severus responded a little impatiently. "So do you have it?"

H.J. unwrapped the small piece of skin as well as a tiny section of tongue. "I said I'd bring it."

Severus picked up both pieces and examined them closely before returning his attention to H.J. "Where did you get these?"

"To be perfectly frank, that's really none of your business." H.J. had no intention of telling Severus where he'd obtained the basilisk parts. "And before we go any further, I'd like an oath from you swearing to keep these transactions to yourself. Of course, you can tell your dealer about me as I need to meet him."

"And if I refuse?" Severus wasn't very keen on taking an oath.

"Then I'll happily obliviate you and walk out of here." H.J. answered calmly.

Severus gave a low laugh. "You think a boy like yourself could actually best me?"

"You'd be surprised." H.J. kept his tone level but confident.

Severus studied H.J. for a moment; there was something about the young man that made him hesitate. "Can you get more?" Severus laid the pieces back down on the cheesecloth H.J. had correctly wrapped them in.

"Obviously, otherwise I wouldn't be bothered about protecting myself." H.J. leant back against the desk. "So do we have an accord?"

Severus pulled out his wand to find that H.J. had drawn his own as well. "It's for the oath."

"And mine's for my protection." H.J. didn't mind letting Severus know that he didn't trust him.

Against his will, Severus felt a faint glimmer of respect for the young man. "Let me just grab a pain potion."

H.J. had a feeling that this wasn't the first time Severus had sworn an oath. "Be my guest."

Severus went into his cupboard and came out after a few moments with a small vial. He then sat on his seat at the front of the classroom and pulled out his wand. "I swear on my life and my magic that I will not reveal details of any transactions between us pertaining to the basilisk to anyone except for my dealer."

H.J. could see beads of sweat appearing on Severus' forehead as he made the vow before then taking the potion. "Now we can deal."

"You asked for an introduction to my dealer, and I'm willing to take you to meet him." Severus knew that Josiah wouldn't be happy but the basilisk would soon change his mind.

"We can do that next time." H.J. had more pressing needs. "Right now, I'm willing to swap one of these pieces for these items." H.J. passed over a list he'd made.

"When do you want them by?" Severus knew he had everything in his own private stock.

"Now." H.J. hadn't been sure whether Severus would have the cat's claw and the Mandrake available; both were sometimes hard to access.

"Stay here." Severus ordered and after a short time returned with a basket. "Everything you asked for is in here. I'd ask what you wanted

with such a strange combination, but you wouldn't tell me, would you?"

"No, I wouldn't." H.J. pointed to the basilisk pieces. "Which one?"

"Both." Severus wasn't willing to let go of either piece. "And I'll act as a liaison between my dealer and yourself." Severus knew that Josiah would prefer to keep his anonymity.

"Very well." H.J. knew that he would probably do better to go through Severus, as the potions teacher would more than likely be able to obtain a fairer price than he would. H.J. was also aware that Severus would probably take a cut for himself, but H.J. believed that even then, he'd still get more for the basilisk than if he'd dealt directly with the dealer himself. "I'll see you next week if you're agreeable."

"I am. And I'd like the basket back." Severus then picked up the two pieces of basilisk, and walked off towards his store cupboard. Even though they were quite small, the basilisk pieces were worth a substantial amount of money on the black market. Severus, however, had no intention of bartering them; he had several potions he'd wanted to try and brew for some time.

H.J. didn't say goodbye, and simply picked up his basket and left. Instead of returning to the girls' suite, he headed for the girls' bathroom, which he and Mione had placed a Fidelius charm over. He'd been surprised that Hogwarts had let him as he, like Mione, believed that the school was sentient to some extent. If it was, it had obviously sensed that they meant no harm as it hadn't alerted anyone to their actions.

Mione and the girls were waiting for him in the Chamber. "Did you have any problems?"

"No." H.J. was smiling. "And as an added bonus, I got an oath out of him as well."

Katherine was surprised. "Snivellus actually agreed to that?"

"Yes." H.J. was feeling better about things after dealing with Severus, and it showed on his face.

Cassandra frowned. "You do know you still can't trust him, don't you?"

H.J. had spent the early hours of the morning lying awake as the sofa had been less comfortable than he'd expected. "This morning I was thinking about what you told me last night, and something occurred to me."

"What?" Cassandra asked.

"When Sirius took Severus in for questioning, do you know if he found a Dark Mark?" H.J. couldn't believe that neither he nor Mione had thought to ask the previous night.

A crease appeared in Cassandra's forehead. "A what?"

Realizing that maybe it was called something different here, H.J. asked a different question. "Did your Voldemort mark his followers?"

"Not as far as I'm aware." Cassandra hadn't thought anything of it the previous day, when H.J. had talked about his own Voldemort branding his followers. "Why?"

"Because it really does make it difficult to track down his followers without one, doesn't it?" H.J. pointed out. "No wonder it was so easy for your Dad and his men to infiltrate a meeting."

"We can discuss that later; right now I want to make a start on these potions. Put the basket on there." Mione stood back to let H.J. put the large basket on the table before rummaging through it to check on its contents. "Great. I can brew Wolfsbane now as well as the Mandrake potion."

Katherine frowned. "What's Wolfsbane?"

Neither Mione nor H.J. had told the girls about Harry's condition. "It's a healing potion that Harry occasionally needs."

“Okay.” Katherine showed little interest after Mione's explanation.

Cassandra, however, was a different matter. “What’s wrong with him? I can see you’ve got cat’s claw, but why the aconite?”

“Let me just finish this Mandrake potion and Harry will tell you if he wants to.” Mione wasn’t going to spill Harry’s secret.

Cassandra knew that this was Mione's polite way of telling her it was none of her business. “I understand.”

One hour later Harry groaned as he came back to awareness. “Would someone like to tell me what happened?”

Mione tartly answered his question. “You were petrified by the basilisk.”

Harry came fully to as he realized where he was, and who was in the Chamber with Mione and H.J. “What are they doing down here?”

“That would be my fault.” Mione then filled Harry in on what had happened since he'd been petrified the previous day. “So Harry, how did you manage to end up petrified? I thought you’d read the books I’d given you.”

“I did but I skipped the stuff on the basilisk.” Harry admitted, before looking at H.J. “So what happened to you?”

“I couldn’t find the basilisk, and decided to climb Slytherin’s statue.” H.J. looked a little sheepish. “The basilisk was nestled inside the head, waiting for me. I’m not really sure how I did it, but somehow I slipped and ended up on the floor. I did manage to transfigure the rooster but the darned thing simply ran out of the cavern. I closed my eyes as the basilisk slithered down to the ground. Not being able to move, I had to sit there waiting for the basilisk to strike but nothing happened. When I finally got up the courage to open my eyes, it had vanished.”

"It probably heard me or went after the rooster." Harry surmised. "So what happened to the basilisk after I was petrified?"

Mione was aware that Harry still hadn't dealt with her question about how he'd ended up like that. "Harry, before I answer that, I'd like to know what happened to you."

"I was trying to use a conjunctivitis spell on the basilisk, and it hit out at me with its tail; at least I think it was its tail. As I hit the floor, I automatically opened my eyes and looked down into the water that was pooled on the floor. I saw a pair of yellow eyes and that's the last thing I remember." Harry looked almost as embarrassed as H.J. "So how did you save us?"

"I used the proper animal to counteract it here; a weasel." Mione gave the Wolfsbane base a stir as she spoke. "It urinated upon seeing the basilisk; the smell is deadly to the basilisk. It certainly went out kicking and screaming."

Harry pulled a face. "Lovely. I take it H.J. did some creative trading with basilisk parts to get this stuff."

"I certainly did." H.J. looked pleased with himself. "We've also offered some of the basilisk skin to the girls to make jackets."

Harry shrugged. "Our friend over there must be almost sixty foot long; I think we can spare a few bits of skin."

As everyone fell silent, Cassandra used the slight lull in the conversation to ask what Mione had refused to tell her about. "So why do you take Wolfsbane, Mr. Sebastian?"

Harry grimaced. "It's Harry in private, and I'm not sure you're going to want to be around me when you find out why."

"Is it contagious?" Luna answered, feeling a little nervous.

"Yes." Harry watched the three girls back off slightly. "But only through a mix of blood and saliva."

The three girls relaxed. Cassandra crossed her arms. "You still haven't told us why you're taking it."

Harry was surprised none of them had guessed. "I'm a werewolf."

Katherine shot backwards. "A werewolf?"

"Yes, Katherine, a werewolf." Harry could see the girl was terrified. "Don't worry; I'm not suddenly going to transform."

"Does it hurt?" Cassandra was a little scared but as she knew that Mione and H.J. trusted Harry, her natural curiosity had risen to the surface overcoming her fear. "When you change I mean."

"A great deal. The Wolfsbane helps a little by taking the edge off it, but its main purpose is to help me keep my faculties." From the minor contact he'd had with her, Harry had decided that he liked Cassandra.

"So you know what you're doing when you're transformed?" Katherine stepped a little nearer to Harry.

"Exactly." Harry smiled encouragingly at Katherine.

"Okay." Katherine relaxed a little but still looked ready to bolt at any moment.

Luna, however, appeared completely relaxed. "I might know something that will help you with the pain." She blushed as addressed Harry directly.

Both Cassandra and Katherine gaped at their friend. Mione, however, wasn't surprised by Luna's comment. "I take it that your Uncle Grimstock might be able to help?"

"Yes." Luna gave a small smile. "I forgot that you knew him in your world."

"He was married to my Mum." Harry told her as he wasn't sure exactly what Mione and H.J. had told the girls.

"Lily?" Cassandra tried to remember what she'd been told the previous night.

Harry shook his head. "No, I'm talking about her sister, Nia, who brought me up."

"Petunia Dursley?" Cassandra made sure she'd got her facts straight.

"The one and the same except that my Mum was the complete opposite in character. I think marrying Dad might have had something to do with it." Harry stretched, trying to work out some of the kinks in his neck. "Speaking of Remus, it only seems like minutes since my meeting with him; it certainly doesn't seem as if a day has gone by."

"So how did it go?" Mione knew that Harry had gone to look over the facilities.

It was then that Harry remembered about Thomas Seville. "I can't believe I didn't tell you straight away. It must be the after effects of being petr..."

H.J. interrupted him. "Just tell us."

Harry got to the point. "I think I've found Voldemort."

"What?" Both H.J. and Mione were astounded. Mione almost stopped stirring at a crucial moment. "How?"

Harry related his brief encounter with Seville. "I'm sure it's him. I haven't felt pain like that for years and it's not something you easily forget."

"You aren't entirely certain though, are you?" Mione could see that Harry had some doubts.

"I'm not but that's mostly because he doesn't look like Voldemort; he doesn't smell like Voldemort, and he has two arms." Harry divulged. "And I know that the knife he used would have prevented him from growing a new arm."

"They're pretty large stumbling blocks." Mione admitted. "But I think we should go with your gut instinct."

"I agree." Harry was glad to receive some support. "However, right now, as I can't prove it and he's done nothing wrong, we can do little more than watch him."

"Dad would probably know more about him." Cassandra joined in the conversation again. "But I'd have to tell him why I wanted to know."

"I'm sorry but we really don't know Sirius that well." H.J. reiterated the comment he'd made to Luna the night before. "One of us would have to meet him."

"I can arrange that." Cassandra turned to Mione. "I know it's a little early but how would you like to spend Christmas with me?"

Harry was a little taken aback at Cassandra's offer to Mione. "We've only known you a week, and yet you're doing everything you can to help us. Why?"

"Because I like Mione, and I don't want to see my world destroyed by a madman." Cassandra told Harry bluntly. "And I know it's going to happen."

Harry was a little thrown by the comment. "What do you mean?"

"Mione and H.J. both swore oaths that they were telling the truth, and if supposedly all powerful beings are scared of your Voldemort, then I should be too." Cassandra thought it would be obvious to Harry.

Harry felt guilty at making Cassandra defend herself. "I'm sorry; I'm not questioning your motives but usually everyone has an agenda of their own."

"I do." Cassandra admitted. "I want a happy and long life."

Mione covered up the potion. "That's ready. I've put a stasis spell on it; it will only take me a few hours to get it finished now. Hopefully it won't react badly with the pain potion when you get it." She suddenly

thought of something. "While I think about it, Harry, you should know that taking an oath hurts here. It didn't hurt me, but I think that's because I'm already dead. However the three girls and H.J. suffered quite painfully. Then again, I didn't swear on my life."

Harry pulled out his wand. "Let's see how it affects me."

"What do you need to swear an oath to?" Luna asked, blushing again as she did so.

"The same as Mione and H.J.; that I'm telling the truth." Harry pretended he hadn't noticed Luna's reaction. "I want you three to be able to trust me."

"That's fair." Katherine was still a little nervous around Harry.

Harry hoped Katherine would relax around him once he'd sworn the oath. "I swear on my life and my magic that I will tell you the truth about my past, and, even though I'm a werewolf, I will never deliberately hurt any of you unless it is out of my power to prevent it." Harry decided to cover himself; after what had happened between him and his Dad, he wasn't willing to take the chance that something similar might occur in future.

The girls waited for Harry to collapse but the white light dissipated harmlessly. Katherine frowned. "You lucky thing. You're just like Uncle Remus; it doesn't affect him either."

Harry's head shot up at the comment. "It doesn't hurt Remus?"

"No." Katherine could see that Harry was a little disturbed. "Why?"

"No reason; I was just surprised." Katherine's remark made Harry suspect that Remus was a werewolf but he didn't know if Katherine and the others were aware of it. Harry wasn't exactly certain he was right about his newly discovered suspicions either, but he intended to find out.

"Let's get out of here." Mione brushed some dust off her sweater. "I'd like to get showered and changed."

The group filed out of the cavern; H.J. and the girls towards their respective rooms, and Harry off to see Remus.

Remus opened his door at the knock. "Harry, I didn't expect to see you today. I don't have an answer about the potion just yet."

"I'm not here about that." Harry sat down when Remus nodded towards the sofa. "Why didn't you tell me you're a werewolf?"

Remus managed to keep his face neutral. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

After spending so long as an Auror, Harry trusted his instincts, and right now they were telling him that Remus was lying. "I've just been informed that you don't suffer pain when swearing an oath; neither do I."

Remus refuted Harry's logic. "That doesn't mean a thing. It's just merely coincidental."

"I disagree." Harry wasn't going to back down. "And I can prove it."

Remus frowned. "How?"

"Like this." Harry pulled out his wand making Remus respond in kind. "I'm not going to attack you." Harry then transfigured a glass Remus had on the table into a silver goblet, before transfiguring his tie into a pair of gloves and slipping them on. "Obviously I can't touch the goblet with my bare skin but if, as you claim, you're not a werewolf, you will be able to." Harry picked up the goblet and held it towards Remus. "Go ahead. Touch it."

Remus scowled. "I don't have to prove anything to you."

"You're right. You don't." Harry agreed and made as if to put the goblet down.

Remus was caught almost unawares as Harry suddenly threw the goblet towards his face instead of putting it back on the table. Only

Remus' quick reflexes stopped the goblet contacting his skin. "Do you realize what you could have done to me?" Remus unthinkingly snapped at Harry.

"Of course." His point having been proved, Harry changed the goblet back to a glass. "So how long have you been a werewolf?"

Remus' shoulders slumped and he sank down into a chair. "Since I was a boy. So now you know, what are you going to do about it?"

"I'm hardly going to tell anyone, but I'd like to know how you mask what you are." Harry wasn't sure if it was a potion or a spell as Luna hadn't mentioned a masking potion.

"A potion." Remus got up and walked over to his cabinet, before pulling out a box which he unlocked. He passed Harry a tube of clear liquid. "You can take this; it will last for three months."

"Thank you." Harry pocketed the liquid.

"Don't you trust me not to poison you?" Remus asked; he'd expected Harry to swallow the potion there and then.

"Right now, I'd have to say no." Harry decided to be honest. "You could have told me about yourself when we spoke yesterday."

"I could have but I chose not to." Remus gave a rueful smile. "I don't know you yet well enough to trust you, and you've hardly endeared yourself to me with the stunt you just pulled."

"It looks as if we're going to work out our trust issues over time." Harry stood up. "I'll have the Wolfsbane ready for both you and your friend, if he exists, two days before the full moon. You'll need to take one goblet full, each night."

"My friend does exist, and he will be grateful." Remus hadn't lied about his friend's existence. "I'll get the pain potion to you as soon as I can."

“Thank you.” With that Harry left. He’d ask Mione to check the potion he was carrying in his pocket before he drank it. Even though he was fairly certain that Remus didn’t intend to harm him, he simply wasn’t going to take it without making sure it was safe first.

23rd September 2002

Remus was tired but he’d had a good transformation. The combination of the pain killing potion and the Wolfsbane had been amazing; to be the werewolf and still to know who he was, was something he’d never thought he’d experience. He was beyond grateful for the potion that Harry had supplied. Things between him and Harry were a little strained but he certainly couldn’t blame Harry for that. Letting his gaze sweep across the bent heads of the students as they scribbled down their answers to the problems he’d written up on the board, Remus’ eyes settled upon Mione Dominic. He wondered if Harry had told her about him.

Mione glanced up to find Remus’ eyes on her, and she felt herself go red under his gaze. Putting her head down, she finished writing up the answer to the final question.

Remus stood up. “If you’ve finished the assignment, you may hand it in now. If you haven’t, then please hand it in at the start of next class.”

Students, grateful for the early dismissal, rushed to pack up their things and hurried towards the door. Mione had finished her work but wanted to check it over before she handed it in. As she went to leave, Remus’ voice stopped her. “Miss Dominic. Could you spare me a moment?”

Susan Bones gave Mione a jealous glance before leaving. Mione turned back to face Remus. “Have I done something wrong, Professor?”

“Not at all. Can you shut the door?” Remus asked as he came around his desk.

Mione nervously shut the door and walked over to where Remus was now leaning against the desk. "Sir?"

"Sit down." Remus ordered. "I have a proposition for you."

Mione was completely taken aback. "What sort of proposition?"

Remus laughed at the worried look on Mione's face. "Nothing insidious. I'm looking for a teaching assistant from among the students; I was wondering if you'd consider it."

Mione's face lit up. "What sort of help would you need?"

"Marking homework for the fifth and sixth years; even taking the occasional class if I have other obligations." Remus informed her. "There will be other things as well but for the time being I think that will be it. I do, however, want you to think carefully about this. I don't want you to take the position if you believe you can't handle it."

"How many hours are we talking about?" As much as she wanted the position, Mione knew that she still had to allow time to cover her other lessons.

"About ten to fourteen hours a week." Remus hoped he wasn't asking too much.

Mione thought for a moment. "I could probably manage twelve but I don't really want to do more than that unless it's an emergency."

"That's fair." Remus held out his hand. "Welcome aboard. If you come to my rooms on the sixth floor tomorrow night at seven, I'll run down everything in more detail. If you change your mind between now and then, let me know."

"I won't." Mione shook Remus' hand. "Thank you, Professor."

"It should be me thanking you." Remus could see how excited the young woman was. "You'd better be off."

“Yes, Sir.” Mione picked up her bag and dashed out of the door towards her next lesson.

Later that evening

Mione sat with Luna waiting for Katherine and Cassandra to return from the library. Luna looked pleadingly at Mione. “I know you’re hiding something; please tell me.”

Mione grinned and shook her head. “Nope. I’m going to tell all of you at once.”

The door opened at that moment and Katherine and Cassandra entered the room. “Thank goodness, I’ve got that charms work done at last. Professor Flitwick is a sweetheart but he certainly sets difficult problems.” Cassandra flopped onto the sofa.

Mione didn’t say that she’d found the charms homework easy. “I’ve got something to tell you.”

Katherine could see that Mione was going to burst soon if she didn’t tell someone. “Harry’s asked you to marry him again?”

Mione grinned at her friend’s romantic nature. “No. Professor Lupin’s asked me to be his teaching assistant.”

All three girls gave a squeal and leapt onto their friend. Cassandra was pleased for Mione but a little jealous at the same time. “I wanted that position.”

“I’m not going to take it then.” Mione hadn’t realized that Cassandra knew about it.

“Don’t be daft.” Cassandra realized that Mione had taken her remark the wrong way. “Before the term began, Uncle Remus had said he would probably have to get an assistant; I just hoped it would be me. If he’s picked you, then it’s because he thinks you’re the best person for the job. If you turned it down now, there’s no guarantee he’d offer it to me.”

“For a moment then, I thought he’d promised it to you first.” Mione was relieved that she hadn’t usurped her friend's position.

“No, I just wanted it.” Cassandra grinned as she got over her slight disappointment. “Does this mean that as you're my friend, you’ll give me good marks?”

Mione laughed. “So far I’ve been told I’ll be marking the fifth and sixth years’ work.”

Luna gave a little smirk. “In that case you can give me good marks.”

Mione threw a pillow at Luna. “You already get good marks; you don’t need a leg up from me.”

“I know but it doesn’t hurt to ask.” Luna threw the pillow back at Mione. “Let’s celebrate. Mummy sent me some homemade cookies and lemonade that I was saving for this weekend.”

Mione made room on the small table in front of the fire. “I thought I couldn’t eat anything else after dinner but I can certainly make room for a few cookies.”

“So when do you start?” Luna bit into a cookie as she asked.

“I don’t know.” Mione was hoping that it would be soon. “I’ve got to see Professor Lupin tomorrow night.”

“Where?” Katherine asked.

“In his rooms.” Mione went red as she responded.

Luna giggled. “All alone?”

“Very funny.” Mione snapped, a little embarrassed. “Anyway, he’s hardly likely to be interested in me.”

The three girls just burst out laughing. Cassandra winked at Mione. “If it makes you feel better, you keep telling yourself that.”

Mione went to get up, only for Katherine to grab her arm. "Mione, we're just teasing."

Mione exhaled. "Sorry." She began to chew her lip. "Do you think other people will say things?"

"Yes." Cassandra answered honestly. "Half of the girls will hate you; most of them will be jealous. I know I am but not for the same reasons as some of them will be."

"I didn't even think about it until you three started teasing me." Mione started chewing her lip again. "Do you think I should still take it?"

"Hell yes." Cassandra couldn't believe that their teasing had caused such a reaction. "Think of how mad it would make Chang and Weasley."

Mione grinned. She didn't get on with either girl; both of them liked Harry and had made it patently obvious to Mione. And like most the girls at the school, both of them also had a thing for Remus. "You're right; it's worth putting up with the backstabbing just for that."

"That's more like it." Cassandra passed the plate of cookies. "Now have another cookie."

As the night wore on, the four girls turned the conversation to other matters.

November 1st 2002

Harry finished his stint of chaperoning at the Halloween Ball and headed back to the library. He had a couple of things he wanted to finish up before the weekend.

Entering the library he was surprised to catch the sound of a quill scratching against parchment. Making his way silently towards the noise, Harry found Hermione Granger with her head buried in a book, making notes. "Miss Granger."

Hermione gave a small scream. "Mr. Sebastian; you frightened me."

"I didn't expect to find anyone here." Harry sat down. "Why aren't you at the Ball?"

"I'm not allowed to attend." Hermione didn't quite meet Harry's eyes. "Well, I am but I might as well not be."

"Because you're a Muggleborn?" Harry asked quietly.

"Yes." Hermione sighed. "I would have liked to go but I have too much work anyway."

Harry looked down at the pile of papers that surrounded the many books that Hermione had on the desk. "Why don't you get this done during the day?"

"Because it's a little uncomfortable being in the library when everyone else is here." Hermione admitted. "I'm not trying to make excuses but this is the only time I can actually get anything done."

"It's alright, Miss Granger." Harry picked up some of the work that Hermione had done so far. Glancing over it, he knew that she was going off on completely the wrong track. "Miss Granger, do you ever get any help with this?"

"Of course not." Hermione panicked. "It's all my own work."

"I don't mean that, Miss Granger." Harry gave her a smile and tried to put her at her ease. "I meant, do any of the teachers ever give extra help?"

Hermione shook her head. "None of them, except for Professor Lupin, and he's been really busy lately."

Harry was aware of how busy Remus had been; Mione was finding herself covering more and more of his classes, leaving her little time to spend with Harry. "Have you asked for help?"

Hermione was reluctant to answer Harry. "I can manage."

Harry could see that Hermione was becoming upset. "Would you like some help?"

Hermione did but she was frightened to say yes. "I really shouldn't."

"Miss Granger, you are out of your depth, and I have a feeling that without someone's help, you might not pass the final exams." Harry knew that she definitely wouldn't with the standard of work he'd just looked at.

Hermione tried to explain, only to begin crying before she'd barely begun her sentence. "I've tried so hard but..."

Harry thought his own world had been awful about Muggleborns but this one was positively hateful. Unable to watch a female cry, Harry pulled Hermione off her chair and into his arms. "Cry it out."

Hermione clung to Harry and let go of all the misery and pain she'd suffered since first starting at Hogwarts.

"No wonder you haven't got a girlfriend, if you make them cry like that." Xander's voice interrupted the pair.

Harry swung round, Hermione's head still buried deep in his shoulder, to find the young man he'd become friendly with during his repeated trips over to the Academy site, leaning against a bookcase. "Xander."

Hermione lifted her head to look at Harry. "I'm sorry, Mr. Sebastian."

"You have nothing to be sorry about, Miss Granger." Harry passed Hermione his handkerchief.

Xander walked over to Hermione. "Are you alright, Hermione?"

"I feel better now, Xan. Thanks." Hermione gave Xander a watery smile.

"Are you two dating?" Harry could see the concern in Xander's face at Hermione's distress.

Both of them shook their heads, but it was Hermione who answered him. "Xander found me here one night trying to struggle this lot, and offered to help." She looked at Xander and gave a shaky giggle. "He had even less idea than I did."

"That's right. Pick on the knight in shining armor." Xander winked at Hermione, before turning to Harry. "So are you offering to help her?"

Harry didn't hesitate. "I most definitely am."

"But you'll get into trouble." Hermione didn't want Harry being ostracized for fraternizing with a Muggleborn.

"I can talk to whoever I want to." Harry started to pack up Hermione's things over her protests that she wasn't finished. "But I think you're more concerned about how difficult it would make things for you, aren't you?"

Hermione nodded. "Even though no-one talks to me, I've still heard about a few girls who are interested in you. If anyone finds out you're helping me, it won't exactly go well for me."

"What do you mean by that?" Harry knew that his tone was sharp but he just hoped that Hermione realized that it wasn't directed at her.

"I'd rather not say." Hermione once more refused to meet Harry's eyes.

"I will." Xander offered.

Hermione turned hurt eyes on Xander. "You promised you wouldn't say anything."

Xander put his hands on Hermione's shoulders. "I think he should know, and besides, I trust Harry."

Hermione gave a tiny but nervous smile. "Okay."

Xander turned back to Harry. "After Remus openly gave Hermione help in class, she ended up in the hospital wing for a week. No-one

was ever blamed for the attack but Hermione thinks it was some of the girls from Ravenclaw. Unfortunately she didn't see their faces; she just heard their voices before she blacked out."

Harry wasn't happy with Xander's revelation but he didn't want Hermione getting upset again by dwelling on it. "You said that Professor Lupin helps; if he can't do it openly, then how do you get help now?"

"He assigns detention with him once or twice a month." Hermione loved spending time alone with the Professor. Although she hadn't told Xander, she'd developed a bit of a crush on the man who, out of everyone at the school, had gone out of his way to help her.

Harry watched a blush creep up Hermione's cheeks as she talked about Remus. "I'm glad Professor Lupin is trying to help you but it isn't enough. Do you know where the tapestry of Barnabas is on the seventh floor?"

"It's just down from my room." Hermione passed it on a daily basis.

Harry frowned. "I thought the entrance to Hufflepuff was off the main hall."

"None of the girls wanted me in the dormitory, so I was assigned a room of my own." Hermione was fond of her room; it was the one place in Hogwarts she felt truly safe. However, she didn't tell Harry that the room was tiny, and had little more in it than a single bed, a chair and a battered desk.

"Do all the Muggleborns have their own rooms?" Harry was aware that there were six Muggleborns in the school.

Hermione nodded. "Yes. No-one really wants to associate with us. I tried making friends with the other Muggleborns but like me, they're afraid to talk to anyone, including each other." Hermione smiled at Xander. "The only reason I'm friends with Xander is that he wouldn't take no for answer. He's really my only friend. I can't count Professor Lupin because he's a teacher."

"Well now you've got two friends if you'd like another one." Harry smiled encouragingly at Hermione.

Hermione nodded shyly. "I'd like that."

"Now getting back to Barnabas. Can you meet me there tomorrow morning at seven?" Harry knew that most of the Gryffindors, the house closest to the tapestry, rarely struggled out of bed before nine on the weekend, so he wasn't too concerned about being seen with Hermione.

"I can." Hermione was puzzled. "But why there?"

"You'll see." Harry handed Hermione the pile of books. "Now get off to your room. Make sure you bring everything with you that need help on tomorrow."

"I will." Hermione felt happier than she had done in a long time. "Goodnight, Mr. Sebastian, Xander."

The two men waved Hermione off. Xander was curious. "So what exactly is this Barnabas thing?"

Harry decided to let Xander in on the secret. "If you can make it tomorrow, go to the seventh floor. You can't miss the tapestry; it's a wizard trying to train trolls to do ballet." Harry laughed at Xander's astounded look. "Bizarre I know. Meet me there at seven."

Aware that he was ahead with the project at the Academy, Xander decided to take an impromptu day off. "I'll see you then."

Harry decided that the work he'd intended to do could wait, and he began to make his way towards the doors. "Lock up when you leave."

"I will." Xander pulled out the drawings he'd originally come into the library to look at, and lost himself in them as Harry closed the doors behind him.

The Next Morning

Harry unlocked the library, before disillusioning himself and making his way to the seventh floor, where he found both Xander and Hermione waiting. "Boo."

Hermione jumped as Harry appeared. Xander just grinned. It was the sort he would have done himself if he could do magic. "So, Mr. Librarian, what magic do you have to show me?"

Harry walked backwards and forwards three times before a door appeared. "In there."

Hermione opened the door and walked in to find a large room furnished with several sofas and a table in front of an open fire. "How did you find out about this place?"

"A friend." Harry pointed at the table. "Put your books down on that table."

Xander looked around the room. "It's hardly inspiring, Harry."

"Watch this." Harry laughed as Xander's mouth fell open.

"But how?" Xander found that he was standing on sand and the ocean was lapping at his feet.

"Magic, Xander." Harry laughed even harder at the annoyed look on Xander's face at Harry's totally unhelpful explanation.

Hermione, who was used to magic, was also astounded. "What is this place?"

"It's called the Room of Requirement. If you want something and wish for it, then the room will supply it." Harry caught the excited look on Xander's face. "And no, Xander, it's not for that sort of thing."

Xander went red. "You can't blame a man for trying."

"Thankfully I don't think the Room will work for you." Harry watched Xander's face fall. "Otherwise I think we'd be knee deep in women right now."

Xander grinned at Harry. "Oh so true."

"If there's something you want, just tell me." Harry waited for the request he knew would be forthcoming from Xander.

"I'd like a cold beer and a corn dog." Xander's mouth watered at the thought of the snack he'd had to live without since arriving in Scotland.

"What type of beer?" Harry couldn't resist showing off the Room's abilities.

"Killians." Xander waited in anticipation. His face assumed a look of bliss as a cold bottle of beer and a dog on a stick appeared in his hands. Putting the bottle to his lips, Xander took a long draught from the bottle. "Aye carumba."

The comment was lost on Hermione as she rarely watched TV. "Does that mean it's good?"

"Like I've just died and gone to beer heaven good." Xander then bit into the corn dog and gave a small whimper of joy. "I have just died and gone to heaven. I love this room."

Harry turned to Hermione. "Would you like something to eat?"

"No thank you." Hermione answered politely.

"Let me just deal with Xander and we can get some work done." Harry turned to Xander. "Is there anything else you want?"

This time Xander didn't hesitate with his request. "A keg, a pool table and a partner to play with."

"If that's what you want." At Harry's words, the beach disappeared to be replaced by a bar with a pool table to the left of it. "There's also a snack tray on the bar."

Xander picked up a cue that was leaning against the wall, and scowled at the blond man standing motionless by the pool table. "You could have provided me with a female partner."

"I could have but we have a young lady here." Harry informed him. "Oh and by the way, the keg only has three beers in it. I don't want to have to explain to Minerva why you're walking around the school drunk."

Sadly Xander could see the logic in Harry's decision. "I think I'll have the beer later. One at this time of the morning is good enough."

Harry led Hermione off to the facsimile of the library that had appeared on the far side of the room. "Everything that's in the library in Hogwarts is here, as well as numerous other books. Let's start with your charms homework." Harry then set up a silencing charm to drown out Xander's over-enthusiastic comments, and the two of them settled down to get some work done.

Ten hours later, Xander was woken from his snooze by Harry. "I think we're done for today."

"Can I come again?" Xander stretched and climbed up from the sofa.

"When I'm here, then yes." Harry didn't quite trust Xander not to take advantage of Hermione, and ask for what Harry had refused to give him.

"I'll see you later then." Xander let himself out of the room.

Harry turned to Hermione. "Do you think you'll need any more help tomorrow?"

Hermione shook her head. "It was really kind of you to take the time to help me today."

"You can use this room whenever you want to." Harry helped her put her books together. "Just don't forget that whatever appears in the room can't be taken out, so make sure you bring enough parchment and whatever else you'll need."

“Will you be here?” Hermione knew that she wouldn’t have been able to get through so much homework so quickly without Harry’s guidance.

Harry assured her of his continued support. “I should be free every other Saturday if you need my help, or if you just want someone to talk to.”

Hermione impulsively gave Harry a brief hug before letting him go. “Thank you so much. You have no idea how much this means to me.”

Harry smiled softly. “I think I do. Now head off and get some dinner.”

“Thank you so much.” Hermione opened the door and walked out.

Harry, however, didn’t leave the room. Instead he made a wish and a swimming pool appeared. After undressing and pulling on the pair of trunks that were waiting for him on the side of the pool, Harry dove into the pool and swam ten laps without stopping in an effort to work off some of his anger. It had been pathetic how grateful Hermione had been for his help. Knowing that he was only going to get angrier if he thought about it, he decided to speak to Mione about her counterpart.

Hearing a knock, Mione opened the door to the girls’ suite. “Harry, is everything alright; you look worried.”

“Can you spare a minute?” Harry stepped inside and was pleased to find the room empty. “Where are the others?”

“Hogsmeade. I had too much work to do and couldn’t go.” Mione sat back down. “So what’s wrong?”

“It’s Hermione Granger.” Harry briefly told Mione about the Muggleborn and her problems. “I hate seeing anyone struggle like that.”

“I have to be honest; I don’t particularly like her.” Mione admitted. “I’ve tried to speak to her several times but she just puts her head

down and acts as if I don't exist unless I'm doing something to do with covering Remus' class." Mione had taken her first class three days after taking the job when Remus had unexpectedly been called out to Cleveland.

"She's frightened, Mione." Harry thought that Mione would be a little more sympathetic. "She thinks she'll get into trouble if she speaks to anyone."

Mione let out a breath. "I didn't realize; I just thought she didn't like me. I know that people are prejudiced against Muggleborns here but..."

She didn't get any further as Harry snorted. "Prejudiced is an understatement, Mione. House elves are treated better than Hermione is. She can't even use the common room in Hufflepuff and is too scared to use the library during the day."

"Calm down, Harry." Mione hadn't seen Harry that angry in a long time.

"I can't." Harry ran his hand through his hair. "It pisses me off that a so-called educated society can treat people this way."

"So you're not just mad because it's her?" Mione thought the fact that it was her counterpart might have something to do with it.

"No." Harry snarled. "I'm angry for all the Muggleborns."

"You can't do anything about it, Harry." Mione pointed out.

"Well I'm doing something about it for Hermione." Harry paced the floor. "I've spent the whole day with her trying to bring her up to scratch with her homework."

Mione felt jealousy shaft through her at Harry's words. "Where?"

"The Room of Requirement." Harry finally stopped pacing. "I actually came here to see if you'd help Hermione if she needed it."

"I can't." Mione felt awful refusing. "Taking on the assistant's position is already eating into my spare time."

Harry scowled at her. "I thought you'd understand."

"Harry, I do." Mione got up and put a hand on Harry's arm. "I want to help. I just don't have the time. If I had, then I'd help. I really would."

Harry let out a sigh as he could see that Mione was being earnest. "I'm sorry at taking it out on you. I'm just so angry at the shit she has to put up with."

"I know." Mione wrapped her arms around Harry's waist. "And you wouldn't be you, if you didn't feel that way."

Harry felt himself start to relax as Mione slid her hands up under his shirt. "You do realize the girls could be back at any moment?"

"Perhaps you'd better kiss me then." Mione closed her eyes and tilted her head.

Harry cupped the back of Mione's neck before caressing her lips with his own. Mione deepened the kiss, pulling Harry closer so that his body connected with the length of her own. Suddenly Harry pulled back and dropped a quick kiss on Mione's lips before letting her go. "I think we have company."

Harry straightened his shirt and stepped away just as Katherine burst in through the door. Katherine blushed. "Sorry."

"It's your room. Harry was just leaving." Mione gave Harry a cheeky grin as he dropped a final kiss on her lips, making Katherine sigh.

As soon as Harry was out of the door, Katherine threw her purchases onto the sofa. "So tell me, have you two finally...?"

Mione shook her head. "Harry only arrived a few minutes ago. He was steaming about Hermione Granger and how unfair everything is for the Muggleborns here."

"He's right; it is unfair but we can't do anything about it." Katherine walked into the kitchenette and poured herself a glass of juice. "Do you want one?"

"No thanks." Mione sat down. "I told him the same but he's hellbent on helping her. He spent all day with her."

Katherine walked back into the sitting area. "You don't seem very pleased about it."

Mione shrugged her shoulders. "I feel bad for her; having to remain quiet while Snape deliberately sabotaged her potion was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. However, I'm not entirely happy about Harry spending so much time with her."

Katherine had been the one to warn Mione not to interfere. "So will he carry on helping her?"

"Probably. He asked me to as well." Mione felt guilty for refusing. "But I just haven't got the time."

"Mione, you can't do everything." Katherine put her hand over Mione's. "So stop worrying about it."

Mione sighed. "I'm just a little jealous."

"Do you think Harry likes her?" Katherine asked quietly.

"Not like that; I'm more jealous that she spent time with him, and I didn't." Mione squeezed Katherine's hand. "Thanks for listening to me rant."

"That's what friends are for." Katherine changed the subject. "So tell me, what's the answer to question four on the homework you assigned yesterday?"

Mione laughed. "I'm not telling. So what did you do today?"

Katherine then began to tell her about her afternoon, and all thoughts of Harry and Hermione Granger were pushed aside.

Next Chapter: H.J. meets someone new; the Ministry Yule Ball;
Mione gets an unwelcome surprise.

Chapter 9: Jumping to Conclusions

November 29th 2002

Harry made his way along the corridor towards the library, only to hear crying. Picking up his pace, he hurried until he wasn't quite close enough to be seen but could still hear what was being said.

Draco Malfoy stood with his arms folded. "Did I say you could use the library when I was in it, Mudblood?"

Hermione shook her head. "I'm sorry. I left my potions textbook here last night."

"Was it on the table at the back of the library?" Malfoy grinned as he asked the question.

Hermione nodded a little fearfully. "Yes; have you seen it?"

Malfoy gave a nasty laugh. "The last time I saw it, it was going up in flames."

Just wanting to get away, Hermione put her head down to hide her tears and started to hurry away from Malfoy, only to bang into someone blocking her path. "I'm sorry."

"I expect you are." Harry Potter brushed off his robes. "You do realize I'm going to have to burn my robes now. I'll never get the stench of your filthy Mudblood hands off them."

Hermione tried to not cry. "I'll replace them."

"No, Miss Granger, you will not." Harry had heard enough and was making his way along the corridor towards the trio. "Potter, Malfoy, detention with Professor Lupin."

Malfoy snorted. "You've got no right to tell me what to do. You're just the librarian."

Harry decided to provide otherwise. "Is that so? 100 points from Slytherin."

Hermione gasped in horror. She knew that Malfoy and Potter would take it out on her. "Please, Mr. Sebastian. It was my fault."

Harry turned his back on the two boys so that they couldn't see his face. He then mouthed 'are you sure' at Hermione, who mouthed 'yes' back. Harry turned back to the boys. "As Miss Granger has accepted the blame, I'll rescind the points deduction."

Malfoy raised an eyebrow disdainfully. "And the detention?"

Harry wasn't going to bend that far. "You will still be serving it Monday night with Professor Lupin."

"What's going on here?" Severus, who was returning from a meeting with Minerva, walked up to the group.

His stepson nodded towards Harry. "He's given us a detention."

Severus looked at Harry. "For what?"

"For using a derogatory term about Miss Granger." Harry informed him.

"What did you call her?" Severus scowled at both Malfoy and Potter.

"Mudblood." Malfoy looked a little uncomfortable under Severus' gaze. "But I don't see why we should get a detention for it; it's what she is."

Severus could have cursed Malfoy for his imprudence. "The detention will stand. Now both of you get out of here. You too, Granger."

"I need a word with Miss Granger about a library book." Harry didn't trust Potter and Malfoy not to hurt Hermione if she left at the same time as them. "Please wait for me in the library."

"Yes, Mr. Sebastian." Hermione went and stood by Harry's desk.

Severus gave Harry a dark look and stormed off. Harry, however, didn't head into the library and stayed where he was. As soon as Severus thought he was out of earshot he stopped the two boys. "Would one of you care to inform me as to what the first rule of Slytherin is?"

"Don't get caught." Potter told him.

"Exactly. And you pair of idiots broke it." Severus wasn't pleased.

"Sebastian came up the corridor behind us. We didn't know he..." Malfoy's voice trailed off under Severus' glare.

"I don't want to listen to your excuses." Severus snapped.

"No, Sir." Malfoy looked down at the floor.

Potter knew that he had slightly more leeway than Malfoy to answer back to Severus, as the man was married to his mother. "But Granger is nothing but a Mudblood. I don't see why the school even lets her come here."

"You know as well as I do why they're allowed to attend." Severus softened slightly as he spoke to his stepson. "Look, I understand your feelings towards Granger. I feel the same way but our esteemed librarian is from a country where they don't understand true wizarding values." Severus let the revulsion he felt color his voice as he spoke. "So in future if you're going to pick on the Mudblood, then do it where you won't get caught."

Both Malfoy and Potter responded at the same time. "Yes Sir."

Potter hadn't quite finished. "Do we still have to do the detention?"

"Yes. Not for demeaning Granger but for being foolish enough to get caught." Severus was irritated by both boys' lack of discretion. "Now get out of my sight."

The two boys hurried away with Severus following at a slightly more sedate pace. Back in the corridor, Harry found himself hard pushed to

stay standing where he was, as anger and disgust at Severus and the two boys almost overwhelmed him. Remembering Hermione, however, he stalked into the library. "Miss Granger, come with me."

Hearing the harsh tone in Harry's voice, a few of the students smirked at each other believing that Hermione was going to get into trouble. Hermione followed Harry up to the seventh floor where he led her into the Room. Harry still hadn't calmed down, but he softened his voice when he addressed the pale faced girl standing opposite him. "Hermione, did they hurt you?"

Hermione shook her head miserably. "No, but they destroyed my potions textbook."

"I'll buy you a new one." Harry offered.

Hermione refused. "You don't have to do that. It was my own stupid fault."

"Why were you in the library?" Harry couldn't understand why she had been there in the first place. "Why didn't you use this Room?"

At Harry's sharp tone, Hermione began to nervously wring her hands together. "It wasn't the weekend."

Harry shook his head in dismay. "Hermione, when I said you could use the room whenever you wanted to, I meant at any time, not just at weekends. As much as it pains me to say it, please don't use the library again."

"I won't." Hermione promised. "I'd better go."

"Will you be alright?" Harry was worried for her.

"I'll be fine." Hermione reassured him. She knew that the two Slytherins wouldn't come after her so soon after being caught out; it would be too obvious that it was them.

Harry waited for the door to close before wishing for a wall. When one appeared, Harry punched it as hard he could time and time again. He was so lost in his anger, that he didn't hear the door opening again.

Hermione stood framed in the doorway. "Oh my God."

"I thought you'd left." Harry hadn't expected Hermione to return.

"I forgot my bag." Hermione pointed to the bag she'd put down by the entrance to the Room. "I came back to get it."

"So off you go then. I'll see you tomorrow." Harry waited for Hermione to pick up her bag and go.

Hermione didn't move. "Why did you do that?"

Harry shrugged. "I was angry."

"I get angry but I don't usually punch a hole through a wall." Hermione felt almost mesmerized by the hole.

"I needed to take my anger out on something." Harry could see how shocked Hermione was at what he'd done.

Hermione walked over and touched the wall before frowning. "It's solid. How did you punch through it?"

"You really want to know?" Harry decided that he wanted to trust her with his secret.

Hermione looked at the hole once more before nodding. "If you really want to tell me."

Harry made up his mind that he might as well tell her everything; not just that he was a werewolf, and he knew that it would take longer than the few hours remaining before curfew. "I do. Meet me here tomorrow after breakfast, and I'll explain then."

Hermione really wanted to know now but agreed to meet Harry in the morning. "I'll be here at 7.30 then."

“So will I.” Harry then vanished the wall before exiting the room to find H.J.

H.J. came out of his bedroom when Harry called out. “What’s up?”

“Can you spare me half an hour tomorrow morning at 7.30?” Harry needed H.J. to tell Hermione what he couldn’t. Even in another world, Harry wasn’t willing to take the chance that his oath to Amicus still held true.

H.J. grimaced. “I can’t Harry. I don’t think I’ll be back.”

It was only then that Harry realized H.J. was dressed in Muggle clothing. He’d been so caught up in thinking about Hermione and her problems that he hadn’t noticed. “Where are you going?”

H.J. rolled back his sleeve and slid his wand into his holster. “London. Faith from the Watchers’ Council has invited me out for the night. As I’m going to be drinking and didn’t fancy apparating back and she’s said that I can stay over at her place.”

Harry wasn’t sure if he trusted or even liked Faith; Remus had introduced her to Harry a few weeks previously. “I didn’t know that you knew her. How did you meet her?”

“She wandered over to the quidditch pitch when I was giving a demonstration to some of the students. After the students had gone back up to the school, she asked if she could catch a ride. I said yes.” H.J. grinned. “I pulled some serious maneuvers with her on the back, and she didn’t even flinch.”

“You do know what Faith is, don’t you?” Harry wanted to make sure that Faith had been upfront about herself.

“She’s a slayer, I know.” H.J. shrugged. “At least we should have an interesting conversation.”

Harry decided that H.J. was old enough to take care of himself. “I’ll see you tomorrow tonight then.”

H.J. was about to leave when he noticed Harry's hand. "How did you do that?"

Harry looked down at his hand which was swollen and bloody. "I hit a wall several times."

H.J. had a sneaking suspicion that it had something to do with Hermione Granger. "What happened?"

Harry filled him in on the incident with the Slytherins, and what he was planning to do. "Which is why I wanted you there."

"Are you sure you should be telling her?" H.J. had his doubts.

"Yes. You and Mione told the girls." Harry pointed out.

"That was different, and we had little choice except to tell them something." H.J. defended their actions. "You don't have any real reason to tell Hermione."

"I don't have to, no, but I want to. I don't want to lie to her, H.J." Harry sat down.

H.J. frowned. "Harry, are you falling for her?"

"What?" Harry's face had a look of incredulity on it. "She's just a student who needs a friend." Harry remembered Xander's comment from the night in the library when he'd first found out how bad things were for Hermione. "She needs a knight in shining armor. That might not be me but I can at least reach out and help her."

"Harry, I know you mean well but we have enough problems of our own. We're not here to bring justice to Muggleborns; we're here to find Voldemort." H.J. reminded Harry of their primary goal.

Harry snorted. "And you're going to do that by going out clubbing with a slayer, are you?"

“As I don’t think one night is going to make any difference, that’s hardly an issue.” H.J. was worried about Harry’s focus. “Harry, if you want to help her, then do it, but don’t let yourself get sidetracked.”

“I need to be able to tell her about Sirius.” Harry began to heal his hand as he spoke.

“Why don’t you ask Mione?” H.J. suggested.

“I can’t.” Harry knew she couldn’t help. “Mione swore an oath to Sirius if you remember. As she’s already effectively dead, I know breaking it can’t kill her but I’m worried it would prematurely end her existence here. And I don’t think she likes Hermione very much.”

H.J. responded in a scathing tone. “Now there’s a shocker.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Harry didn’t like H.J.’s attitude.

H.J. couldn’t believe that Harry hadn’t worked it out. “She’s jealous, Harry. You’ve ended up spending nearly every Saturday this month with Hermione, while Mione tries to play catch up with her schoolwork. How do expect her to feel?”

Harry was stunned. “I hadn’t realized. But I don’t see Hermione that way; she really is just a friend.”

“You’re talking to the wrong person, Harry.” H.J. could see that Harry was truly astounded by what he’d just told him. “Look, I know how awful it is for Muggleborns here. My Hermione would have had a fit if she’d been around.” H.J. let a smile play across his lips as he thought about how angry she would have been. “She believed in equal treatment for everyone, even going as far as creating a society for the protection of house-elves.”

Harry could see that this was a good memory for H.J. “This world could do with someone like her.”

“She was a Muggleborn, Harry, and I’m almost willing to bet that she’d have been just like Hermione Granger if she’d grown up here. It was only because Herms became friends with Ron and me that she

changed.” H.J. sighed. “The Hermione Granger here hasn’t had a catalyst like that to spur her on, and from the way people treat Muggleborns here, I doubt that anything like that will ever happen to her. You’ve just pointed out what a prick our counterpart here is, and from what I’ve seen of Ron, he’s not much better. Herms only became the woman she was because she had support from her friends; something Hermione lacks.”

“I’m trying to support her but I’ve got no power or authority to do much. I was staggered when Snape didn’t immediately override the detention I gave to Potter and Malfoy. After eavesdropping on his conversation, I now know why.” Harry could feel his anger beginning to rise to the surface again as he thought about the teacher’s appalling attitude. “It’s not fair that Muggleborns should be penalized for their bloodlines.”

“Harry, I do understand.” H.J. sat down opposite Harry. “But you’re neglecting Mione for someone who looks like she once did, and to be perfectly frank, is currently alive and kicking. I can’t blame Mione for being so defensive.”

“Do you think I should cancel Hermione and spend the day with Mione instead?” Harry was torn as to what to do.

“You can’t.” H.J. answered reluctantly. “Mione’s going to be in London tomorrow with Remus. Something to do with some extra work she’s been doing for him relating to the Council.”

“Extra work?” Harry was dumbfounded. “She didn’t tell me.”

“Are you honestly surprised?” H.J. questioned Harry as he checked the time. “Look, I’ve got to go. Just think about what I’ve said.”

With that, H.J. left Harry sitting alone with his thoughts. After a few minutes he got up and hurried out of his room towards the girls’ suite on the second floor.

Luna opened the door and blushed as she always did when she saw Harry. “Come in.”

"Is Mione here?" Harry walked into the sitting room which was empty.

"Let me just get her." Luna went into the bedroom and came out a few minutes later. "She won't be a minute. Can I get you anything?"

Harry shook his head and sat down to wait. After a few minutes a slightly flustered Mione came out of the bedroom. "Harry, is everything alright?"

"Can you spare me some time?" Harry could hear the pleading tone in his voice.

Mione also heard it. "Do you want to go somewhere else?"

"H.J. has gone out, so our rooms are empty." Harry opened the door.

Mione turned to Luna. "I won't be long."

Harry hid his dismay at Mione's comment, and they both walked in silence to his rooms. Once inside, Harry closed the door and turned to her. "Mione, why didn't you tell me you were doing extra work for Remus?"

Mione sat down. "Because I haven't had the chance, Harry. If I'm not doing something, you are."

"I had to find out from H.J. that you're going to London tomorrow." Harry knew he sounded almost accusatory.

Mione responded in a defensive tone. "H.J. asked me what I was doing this weekend, so I told him."

"Mione, are you going to London this weekend because of the time I've been spending time with Hermione Granger?" Harry asked quietly.

"Harry, my main reason for going to London is because Remus asked me to go with him to take notes. His assistant is sick, and his secretary already has plans. He also thought it might be nice for me to see the London premises." Mione explained. "But yes, I admit the

fact that you've been spending so much time with Granger did influence me somewhat."

Harry winced at Mione's use of Hermione's last name. "You really don't like her at all, do you?"

Mione knew she had to be honest. "No, Harry, I don't. I think she's pretty spineless to be truthful." Watching Harry's face darken, Mione held up her hand. "I know it's hard for her here but she doesn't do herself any favors by hiding in corners and shrinking away from people all the time."

Harry could hardly reconcile the Mione he thought he knew with the one who was being so unkind about Hermione. "Do you think you might be being influenced by your pureblood roommates and your own upbringing?"

"No, Harry, I don't." Mione denied Harry's accusation. "Neville Longbottom is a pureblood, and I think exactly the same about him, so I'm not singling her out for special treatment just because she's a Muggleborn."

Harry decided to test H.J.'s theory. "Mione, are you jealous of her?"

Mione sneered. "You've got to be joking."

Harry knew then that H.J. had been right. "I think you are, aren't you?"

"I've just said I'm not." Mione snapped at Harry.

Harry lifted an eyebrow, and Mione got angrily to her feet. "Okay, yes Harry. I'm bloody jealous of her. I hate that you spend so much of your time with her when I want you to spend it with me." Mione's voice caught. "I feel as if she's taking you away from me."

Harry was relieved that Mione's uncharacteristic vindictiveness towards Hermione seemed to stem only from her jealousy. "Mione, she needs a friend, and right now in this school I'm it. But that's all I

see her as.” Harry took Mione’s hand in his own. “Mione, I love you more than anything and anyone.”

Mione felt her fears begin to fade at Harry’s declaration. “And I love you.”

Harry slid his arms around her and kissed her gently. “Let’s spend this evening together.”

Mione shook her head regretfully. “I’m can’t, Harry. I have things I need to get finished before I leave in the morning but I’m free until nine tomorrow if you want to meet me for breakfast in my suite.”

Harry’s face fell. “I’ve already made plans for the morning.”

Mione scowled. “You’re spending it with her, aren’t you?”

“Yes.” Harry admitted. “I want to tell Hermione about where we’re from.”

Mione stiffened. “Harry, you can’t do that. What if she tells someone?”

“You told your friends.” Harry had a feeling that things were about to go downhill again.

“That was different. They’re trustworthy.” Mione knew she’d said the wrong thing as Harry let go of her.

“So is Hermione.” Harry didn’t mind Mione being jealous but he did mind Mione judging the trustworthiness of someone she barely knew.

Not wanting to make things worse, Mione backed off. “I’m sorry; I shouldn’t have said that, but I really don’t think telling her is a good idea.”

“Okay, I won’t tell her about all of us.” Harry also didn’t want to rock the boat. “But I am going to tell her I’m a werewolf. She’s already seen me punch a hole through a solid wall.”

"A wall?" Mione questioned Harry.

Harry gave her a brief rundown on what had happened. "I couldn't exactly hide what I'd done as she actually saw me in mid-punch."

Mione lifted Harry's hand and gently placed a kiss on it. "Please don't do that again. I can see why you got angry though. Snape is a bastard to allow the Slytherins to get away with something like that. Even worse, he's flagrantly encouraging their behavior."

"I hate him." Harry admitted. "Even though he looks like Severus, I'm constantly being made aware that he's nothing like him."

"Tell me something I don't know." Mione sighed as she caught sight of Harry's clock that sat on the mantelpiece. "I'm sorry Harry, but I really need to get back."

Harry enfolded Mione in his arms and began to gently kiss her neck. "Are you sure I can't persuade you to stay?"

Mione pulled free of Harry's grasp. "I'd like to but I really can't. I've still got too much to do before I go."

"Why don't we get together on Sunday?" Wanting to get over their rocky patch, Harry knew he needed to spend some time alone with Mione.

Mione sighed regretfully. "I'm not returning from London until Sunday evening. How about next Saturday?"

Harry didn't really want to wait that long but having little choice, he agreed. "Next Saturday then."

Mione turned towards the door. "I'll let you know what time."

Harry grabbed Mione's hand. "Don't I get a goodbye kiss?"

Smiling, Mione reached up and pulled Harry down for a kiss he found far too brief. "I'll see you then."

Mione disappeared out of the door, and Harry was once more left alone.

The Next Day

Harry was sitting in the Room when the door opened and Hermione Granger made her way in. "Hi."

"Hi, Hermione." Harry indicated that she should sit down. "I see you've brought your books."

"I've got quite a lot of work to do." Hermione placed the books on the table. "Are you still able to help me?"

"I will once I've talked to you about yesterday." Now the time to tell her had arrived, Harry suddenly found he was nervous about her reaction.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to." Hermione assured Harry.

"I do want to but I'm afraid of how you're going to react." Harry admitted.

Hermione wondered what he had to tell her. "Harry, I'll still be your friend no matter what it is."

Harry smiled at Hermione's earnestness. "If you don't want to be my friend after I tell you then that's okay, but I'd really be grateful if you'd promise not to repeat what I'm about to tell you."

"I promise I won't tell a soul." Hermione's tone was one of sincerity. "And I've no-one to tell here anyway as no-one talks to me."

Harry took a deep breath. "Hermione, I'm a werewolf."

Hermione was about to say something when the door opened and Xander appeared. "Hi guys I thought I'd drop..." His voice trailed off as he saw how pale Hermione had gone. "Is something wrong?"

Hermione shook her head. "Harry and I were just talking."

Xander flopped down next to Hermione, and looked back and forth between Harry and Hermione. "Is it a big secret or can anyone join in?"

Harry decided to tell Xander the truth as well. "As long as you promise to keep this to yourself."

"I'd say Scout's Honor, but as I've never been one I'd be lying." Xander grinned at Harry. "Go ahead; I won't say anything."

Harry hoped that Xander would still be smiling after he'd told him. "I'm a werewolf."

"So what?" Xander shrugged his shoulders. "I know and am particularly fond of several, which I think now includes you, in a manly fond sort of way."

Harry laughed out loud at Xander's expression of his feelings. "I feel the same way about you too." He then turned to Hermione who was still a little pale. "Are you alright?"

Hermione gave a shaky smile. "Yes but I have to admit I'm a little shocked. However, after seeing what you were capable of yesterday I really shouldn't be."

Xander was interested to know what had happened. "So what did you do yesterday?"

"Put a hole through a wall." Harry looked a little sheepish. "I caught two of the Slytherins insulting Hermione. Afterwards I heard their head of house encouraging to them to continue to call Hermione a Mudblood." Harry glanced at Hermione. "I don't mean that term personally."

Hermione was horrified. "Snape's encouraging them?"

"Now you know why I was so angry." Harry could sense that Xander was also angry at Hermione's treatment.

"That really sucks." Xander gave Hermione a brief hug. "Isn't there anything you can do?"

Harry sat and thought about it for a while. "I can't be with Hermione all the time but I could probably give her something like a coin or a ring which will alert me to the fact that she's in trouble. I should have thought about it before."

"I don't want to be any bother." Even as she spoke, Hermione could feel hope rising inside her that Harry might be able to help.

"Leave it with me. Right now, you've got work to do." Harry reminded her as he got up. "Are you really okay with what I've told you?"

Hermione met Harry's eyes; something she didn't do often. "I am and I still want to be your friend, even though I have to be truthful and say that I am a little scared of you now."

Harry felt warmth fill him at Hermione's honesty. "I swear I'll never hurt you intentionally."

Xander coughed. "Now we've got that touching moment out of the way, do you think one of you could supply me with these comics? Throw in some Twinkies and a large soda and I'll be all set."

Harry took the paper that Xander was holding before assuming a puzzled look. "X-Men?"

"Please tell me you've heard of Storm and Wolverine." Xander couldn't believe that Harry had never heard of the X-Men.

"Sorry but no." Harry shook his head before wishing for each title that Xander had requested.

Xander picked up a comic from the top of the pile that appeared on the table in front of him. "Ah, comic heaven."

Harry just smiled and followed Hermione over to the library which was waiting for them.

December 11th 2002

Mione and Katherine were both soaking in the large bathtub in the girls' bathroom when Mione brought up the subject of the Ministry Yule Ball that would be held on Christmas Eve. "I'm not really looking forward it. I have to admit I did think about not going."

"But you've got to, everyone goes to it." Katherine protested. "My only concern about going is that I'm going to end up accompanying Dad again if I don't find someone else to take me."

"I thought Neville Longbottom had asked you." Mione thought that Neville was a complete drip but didn't say that to Katherine.

"I'd rather go with Dad." Katherine liked Neville but not in that way.

"What about your brother?" Mione suggested.

"Yuk." Katherine pulled a face. "Anyway, Harry's going to be in Italy with Snivellus and the Malfoys."

Mione pulled a face of her own at the mention of Severus. "I bet you're glad you're eighteen now and can refuse to go."

"You've no idea." Katherine had turned eighteen at the start of November, and had refused to accompany Lily and her family to Italy when Lily had demanded she go. "I know Mum was upset, but I just can't face a week with Snivellus and his brats, to say nothing of the Malfoys."

Mione winced at the venom in Katherine's voice. "Let's talk about something a little more pleasant."

Katherine didn't need any coaxing. "Sounds good to me."

"Did Orion ask Luna again?" Mione knew that Orion was refusing to give up on pursuing their friend.

“Yes. And she said no yet again.” Katherine felt sorry for Orion. “I think I might actually ask Orion whether he wants to go with me.”

Mione was surprised at Katherine’s declaration. “You like Orion?”

Katherine laughed and shook her head. “Not like that, but I don’t want to go with Neville, and I certainly don’t want to go with Dad again. If I ask Orion, I bet he’ll go as my friend.”

“You do know he’ll spend the evening mooning after Luna, don’t you?” Mione couldn’t believe that Katherine would want to accompany someone who was so obviously pining for someone else.

“I’m not bothered.” Katherine truly wasn’t. “I just don’t want to go to another ball where Lavender Brown and her cronies get to laugh at me for accompanying Dad. So am I right in assuming that Harry is taking you?”

Mione grinned. “Of course.”

“Who’s H.J. taking?” Katherine knew that Cassandra still hadn’t gotten over her crush on the flying instructor, and she wondered if there was any chance for her friend.

“Faith, I think.” Mione had met her when she was in London with Remus, and she hadn’t been entirely sure how to take the girl.

“Faith?” Katherine asked.

“The dark-haired girl I waved at when we were in Hogsmeade last Sunday.” Mione watched Katherine frown as she tried to recall Faith.

Now that she’d been reminded, Katherine thought she remembered who Faith was. “The one who was dressed in the leather trousers?”

“Yep. Now I think I should get out of this bath before I wrinkle up like an old prune.” Mione climbed out of the massive bath and headed into the shower to rinse off the bubbles that were still clinging to her skin and hair.

December 24th 2002

Katherine made her way downstairs to find James waiting for her. "So what do you think, Dad?"

"You look more grown-up every year." James had never felt so proud of his daughter.

"That's because I am." Katherine laughed and kissed James on the cheek.

"What time is Orion arriving?" James couldn't keep the hopeful tone out of his voice.

"Dad, we're just going as friends." Katherine knew that both her Dad and Sirius harbored hopes of their children pairing up.

"You never know, you might find that you actually have more in common than you think." James liked Orion and thought he'd make a very suitable son-in-law. He'd given up on the idea of Harry and Cassandra as the pair rarely spoke to each other, and when they did it usually deteriorated into an argument.

"Dad!" Katherine knew she sounded a little whiny but she didn't want James to get his hopes up for nothing.

"Okay, okay." James held up his hands in surrender. "Just have a good time."

"I'm sure I will." Katherine hesitated. "Dad, why don't you ever take anyone else with you, like a date?"

"Now is not the time, Katherine." James didn't want to discuss his love life with his daughter.

Not wanting to upset him, Katherine simply hugged her father and hurried off to get her gloves before Orion arrived.

Orion was receiving the same kind of treatment from Sirius as Katherine had just undergone with James. "Now, have you got the flowers?"

"Dad, we're only going together because neither of us has anyone else to go with." Orion scowled as he picked up the flowers Sirius had ordered for him to give to Katherine.

"But you wouldn't have asked her if you weren't a little interested, would you?" Sirius, like James, couldn't help but be a little hopeful.

"Dad, she asked me." Orion admitted.

His confession only made things worse. "In that case, she must like you."

Orion just groaned and gave up. "I've got to go, Dad. Tell Cassandra, I'll see her later."

"I will, and have a good time." Sirius watched his son open the door and hurry out.

Ten minutes later Orion found himself walking into the ballroom with Katherine on his arm. "I hate attending this every year."

"You're not the only one." Katherine smiled politely at some of her fellow Gryffindors. "I can't see Mione or Luna."

Remus suddenly appeared at Katherine's elbow. "Katherine, Orion."

"Uncle Remus." The two children chorused together before grinning at each other. Katherine gave Remus a kiss on the cheek. "Have you seen Luna?"

"Grim sent a message to say that she won't be here tonight. She's not feeling well." Remus watched Orion's face drop. "Why don't you two get yourselves something to drink? I'm going to say hello to Peter."

Katherine watched Remus walk over to where Peter Pettigrew was sitting with a small, slightly dumpy woman. "Do you think we should go over?"

"We'll see Uncle Peter and Aunt Carrie tomorrow." Orion sounded dejected. "Let's grab something to drink and go sit out in the gardens. I hate these crowds."

Katherine waved at Peter and Carrie before following Orion over to the refreshment table, where she picked up a glass of champagne. Orion scowled. "It's not fair. I can only have juice."

"When you reach eighteen, then you can drink champagne." Katherine said loudly before whispering in Orion's ear. "I'll let you have some of this when we're alone."

Orion grinned at his friend. "Come on then."

Katherine followed Orion into the gardens where a few people were standing, but there weren't nearly as many people as there had been inside. "Let's go over to the far side; I doubt there'll be anyone over there."

As Katherine had suspected, the very far side of the gardens was empty except for a couple sitting in one of the many arbors that overlooked a small artificial lake. "I do like this spot."

Orion sat down in one of the arbors. "It's probably the only bearable place here. I'm just glad that they decided to hold it at this hotel again."

The Ball was being held at the Grand Hotel; a wizarding hotel set on the Dorset coastline. Katherine inhaled deeply. "I love the smell of the sea air."

"At least it's not freezing in here." Orion looked up at the snowflakes that were falling and dissipating as they reached the barrier which kept the gardens warm and pleasant year round. "I couldn't believe how cold it was when I walked over to collect you."

“You should have just floored.” Katherine had been the one to apparate them both to the Ball, as Orion was still too young to gain his license.

Orion grinned. “Dad was worried about my getting ashes on the flowers.”

Katherine groaned lightly. “Not your Dad as well.”

“I’m afraid so.” Orion admitted. “He wouldn’t accept that we’re just friends.”

“Tell you what.” Katherine handed over her glass of champagne so that Orion could take a sip. “If neither of us has a date for the Easter Ball, then we’ll go together. It will drive our parents mad.”

Orion gave a laugh very similar to that of his Dad. “Great idea.”

The two smiled conspiratorially at each other before falling into a companionable discussion about their classmates and home lives.

Inside the ballroom H.J. was scanning the room for any sign of Thomas Seville. “I thought he’d be here.”

“Who?” Faith looked around the room.

“No-one important.” H.J. dismissed all thoughts of Seville from his mind. “So what do you think of this lot so far?”

“Bunch of stuffed...” Faith’s voice trailed off. “Well, I think the evening just got more interesting.”

H.J. looked over to where Faith was staring. “That’s Sirius Black, head of Auror Division.”

“Who’s that with him?” Faith hoped it wasn’t Sirius’ wife.

H.J. had to look twice before he recognized Cassandra, who was wearing make-up and looked a lot more sophisticated than she did at

school. "You've probably seen her at Hogwarts; it's his daughter Cassandra."

"Introduce me to him." Faith ordered H.J.

"I can't." H.J. had learned to be a little more cautious about introductions. "I don't know him."

"But you do know Cassandra Black, don't you?" Faith stood up. "So introduce me to her, and then ask her to dance."

"I take it this means you're moving on." H.J. wasn't particularly bothered. Both he and Faith had known that their liaison had been strictly temporary.

"It does." Faith gave an impish smile. "But it was good while it lasted."

H.J. rolled his eyes but nonetheless led Faith over to where Cassandra and her father were standing. "Good evening, Cassandra."

Cassandra felt her stomach tighten. "H.J." Remembering her manners, Cassandra turned to her Dad. "Dad, this is H.J. Sebastian, the assistant flying instructor from school. H.J., my father, Sirius Black."

"Lord Black." H.J. inclined his head slightly. "This is Faith Lebane from the Watchers' Council."

"Miss Lebane." Sirius took Faith's hand and kissed it politely.

"Lord Black." Faith thought that Sirius was even hotter close up; his dark good looks were faintly reminiscent of a teaser poster she'd seen for a movie about pirates that was currently being filmed.

H.J. turned to Cassandra. "Would you like to dance?"

Cassandra could barely believe her good luck. "Thank you."

As H.J. led Cassandra off, Sirius made the same offer to Faith. "Would you care to follow suit?"

Faith cast a glance at the dancers. "I don't think you'd be walking by the end of the evening."

Sirius barked out a laugh. "I'm willing to take my chances."

"Don't say I didn't warn you." Faith wondered what she'd let herself in for as she let Sirius lead her onto the dance floor.

H.J. smiled down at Cassandra. "So are you looking forward to leaving school?" She'd made it clear on the night they'd all talked that she couldn't wait for her last year to be over.

"Absolutely." Cassandra wasn't a huge fan of school even though she did well in it. "I've already applied to join the Auror Division."

"Aren't you bothered about whispers about nepotism?" H.J. knew he would be.

"Not particularly." Cassandra looked around the room before answering. "How many people here do you think got their position in the same way?"

H.J. grinned. "You've got a point."

Cassandra frowned as she saw her Dad laughing with Faith as he span her around the room. H.J. caught the frown. "What's wrong?"

"You are dating her, aren't you?" Cassandra kept her eyes on the couple who had now moved to the far side of the room.

"Not anymore." H.J. didn't bother to say that there hadn't been much dating involved in his and Faith's relationship.

"I was afraid of that." Cassandra hated the way that Faith was looking at Sirius.

"I think your Dad can look after himself, Cassandra." H.J. said gently as the music ended. "Now tell me who escorted you tonight, and I'll return you to them."

"I actually came with Dad." Cassandra knew she was blushing. "Most, well all, of the boys at the school aren't interested in me."

H.J. didn't dwell on the point. "So I can't return you to someone. Would you care for another dance then?"

Cassandra glanced quickly around the room. "Perhaps I'd better not."

"I thought only Muggleborns had to worry about being picked on." H.J. ignored Cassandra's refusal, and simply swept her around the room once more.

"As I'm a pureblood, no-one would dare to hurt me, but they can make things awkward for me." Cassandra had had work destroyed, and potions tipped over on previous occasions.

"And why would they do that because you're dancing with me?" H.J. wanted to see if Cassandra would be honest with him.

Cassandra went red but answered the question. "Because quite a lot of the girls really like you."

H.J. had heard rumors but nothing concrete. "Well you can rest assured that I'd never do anything about it. I have no wish to jeopardize my position."

Cassandra felt a little disappointed but understood where H.J. was coming from. "I don't blame you."

H.J. scanned the room again from over Cassandra's shoulder. "I expected to see Thomas Seville here but as yet I haven't spotted him. I thought everyone attended this function."

"Normally they do." Cassandra suddenly realized something. "I thought only Harry had met him."

"I've seen Harry's memory of him." H.J. admitted. "And before you say anything, I know using a pensieve is illegal."

"I'm not going to say anything. I've got as much to lose as you if he's as dangerous as you say." Cassandra gave a small shiver. "I sometimes wish I didn't know but at the same time I'm glad I do."

H.J. knew the feeling. "I think I'd rather know; at least I'm forewarned." He looked around the room again. "Dumbledore."

Cassandra glanced over to where H.J. was staring. "Do you want to meet him? I've known him since I was small."

H.J. looked down in amazement at Cassandra. "And you didn't think to tell us?"

"You didn't say you were after him, so why would I?" Cassandra frowned at H.J. "Or are you after him as well?"

"No, we're not." H.J. glanced back over at Dumbledore who was talking to a woman he didn't recognize. "Who is he talking to?"

Cassandra grimaced. "Arabella Zabini."

"Do you think she's on the hunt for another husband?" H.J. had never met her before but he had a feeling that she was a maneater no matter what world she resided in.

Cassandra confirmed his suspicions. "Probably but I think Uncle Albus is a little too old for her." Cassandra knew, like most of the purebloods in her circle, that Arabella's tastes ran to attractive and rich young men.

"Uncle Albus?" H.J. queried.

"I said I've known him since I was little." Cassandra reminded him. "He's actually Harry Potter's godfather."

"Do you have godparents?" H.J. knew it had no bearing on finding Voldemort but he was interested anyway.

"Uncle Remus and Aunt Lily." Cassandra informed him. "Dad was your godparent in your world, wasn't he?"

"Yes." H.J.'s face became tight as he thought about Sirius, and he changed the subject. "I'm getting a little warm. Would you like something to drink?"

Cassandra shook her head. "No, but if you want to go ahead, you can take me over to Uncle Remus."

H.J. led Cassandra over to Remus before excusing himself.

On the dance floor, Sirius, who'd been watching his daughter and H.J., looked down at Faith as the music ended. "Did H.J. escort you tonight?"

"Yes." Faith let Sirius lead her off the dance floor towards Remus and Cassandra.

"So are you leaving with him tonight?" In spite of what he knew about Faith, Sirius had to admit he was interested in the young woman who'd dared to turn up at the Ball in a black dinner jacket and trousers.

"No." Faith felt her stomach churn with excitement at the anticipation of a new conquest.

"I'm just going to do the rounds here before I leave." Sirius hated doing it but as head of Auror Division he had little choice. "When I've finished, would you like to come back to my place and join me for a nightcap?"

Faith gave a predatory smile. "I'd like that."

Sirius addressed Cassandra as they reached his daughter. "I'm just going to speak to a few people but after that I'm leaving. Will you be alright if I leave you to go home with Uncle James or do you want me to come back for you later?"

"I'll be fine with Uncle James, Dad." Cassandra hated being treated like she was ten years old. "I'm off to find Mione and Harry, so I'll see you later." Cassandra hurried away before Sirius could say anything more.

Sirius also excused himself, leaving Faith alone with Remus. "So boss, who did you come with?"

"I came alone." Remus informed her.

Faith knew that quite a few of the slayers liked Remus. "You could have asked one of the London based girls to come with you."

"But then I would have had to stay a lot longer than I'm going to." Remus pointed out. "I've done my duty by circulating and I'll be leaving shortly, but I can wait with you until Sirius gets back if you want me to."

"Nah. You can go if you want to." Faith wasn't going to admit that she felt a little uncomfortable.

Remus could smell her nervousness. "I was intending to have one more drink before I left so why don't you come with me?"

Faith shrugged. "Whatever."

Remus hid his smile at Faith's attitude. He knew that she was more vulnerable than she led people to believe. "Come on then."

In the gardens, Harry was walking hand in hand with Mione, and finally brought up the subject they'd both been avoiding discussing all evening. "I'm sorry about yesterday."

"Harry, it wasn't your fault." Mione squeezed his hand. "It was mine." She sighed. "I just don't know what's wrong with me."

"Nothing's wrong with you." Harry reassured her. "Look, it's been a long time since we last made love. We've both changed, so I should have expected you to feel nervous."

"Nervous?" Mione gave a slightly bitter laugh. "I bolted like a sixteen year old virgin. I've done nothing but complain about how little time I get to spend with you, and when I get the chance, I panic."

"Mione, I just think it's going to take time." Harry reassured her. "I also think you're a little uptight because of your unique situation."

"Why don't you just say because I'm dead?" Mione asked.

"Because I can't bear acknowledging that fact, and with you looking like this, it doesn't seem that way." Harry hated to even think about it.

Mione gave a small smile. "Yesterday wasn't exactly the stellar event we thought it would be, was it?"

"No, it wasn't." Harry smiled back. "I'm a little sorry now that you agreed to stay at Cassandra's for the rest of the Christmas break."

"We need to find out whether Sirius can be trusted." Mione was also regretting her acceptance, but there was little she could do about it now.

Harry spotted Cassandra coming their way and led Mione over to her. "If you two ladies will excuse me, I think I'm going to head off home. I'll see you both on Boxing Day."

Mione was disappointed that Harry was going so soon. "Merry Christmas, Harry."

"Merry Christmas, Mione, Cassandra." Harry kissed both girls on the cheek before walking away.

Cassandra turned to her friend. "You don't look happy."

"I'm not." Mione's shoulder slumped. "Let's find somewhere to sit down." The two of them walked around the gardens until they found a quiet spot for them to sit in. "I don't know what to do."

Cassandra was really concerned at Mione's sad expression. "Please tell me what's wrong."

"It's Harry." Mione felt tears well up. "I really love him but..."

Cassandra put an arm around Mione. "Something's not working?"

"Exactly." Mione sniffled and found a tissue, before deciding to open up to her friend. "We started to make love yesterday afternoon but I panicked and ended up in the bathroom."

"Mione, it's been a long time since you and Harry made love, hasn't it?" Cassandra asked gently.

"A very long time but it's never felt like this before; this time it just felt so wrong." Mione began to shred her tissue. "And I wanted it to be perfect."

As the most sexual thing Cassandra had ever had done was receive a kiss that she'd hated, she was slightly at a loss but did her best anyway. "Do you think that after spending so much time apart during the school term and because you haven't slept together in so long, you put too much pressure on yourself?"

Mione thought about it; Harry had more or less said the same thing. "You might be right." She blew her nose. "It's just that I love him so much, and I want to be with him more than anything."

"Then that's all that's important." Cassandra reassured her friend. "I'm sure that everything will work out for you in the end."

Mione let out a shuddering breath. "You're right. Perhaps if I stop worrying about it, then everything will just fall into place."

Cassandra gave her friend a big hug. "Let's cheer ourselves up and get a glass of champagne. Dad said I could have one."

"He's very protective of you, isn't he?" Mione knew from what Cassandra had told her, Sirius kept close tabs on both of his children.

"I think he's afraid that something will happen to us." Cassandra hated Sirius treating her like a child, but at the same time, she

understood that Sirius only did it because he cared about her and Orion.

"It's nice he cares so much." Mione stood up.

Cassandra smiled as she thought about her Dad. "It is. Now let's get that glass of champagne, and see if we can find Katherine and Orion."

As Cassandra mentioned Orion's name, Mione's hand flew to her mouth as she realized something. "Oh no. I was so flustered about what happened with Harry and me that I forgot to pick up Orion's gift. It's still in my closet back home."

"Let's go get it now." Cassandra suggested. "No-one will miss us."

The two girls made their way to the apparition point and Mione took Cassandra's hand. "I'll have to side-apparate you."

"I trust you." Cassandra had barely spoken the words when she found herself in a small bedroom.

Mione walked over to the closet and took Orion's gift out of it. "Let's go down and see Harry." After her talk with Cassandra, Mione wanted nothing more than to be held by him.

Cassandra grinned at her friend. "Let's sneak up on him and surprise him."

"He's a werewolf, Cassandra." Mione reminded her friend.

"I forgot." Cassandra felt silly. "Let's just go down and see him then."

The two girls were halfway down the stairs when a girl's laugh rang out from the sitting room. Mione stopped on the stairway at the sound.

"I really don't know what I would have done without your help." Mione immediately recognized the high, slightly shrill voice and stiffened.

She couldn't catch the reply, but she could tell it was a man. Whatever he'd said had made Hermione Granger laugh again.

Suddenly a second high-pitched voice came floating out of the sitting room. "I've got some mistletoe. Are you going to kiss Aunt Hermione under it?" Mione recognized it as belonging to Camellia. Hermione had wondered who was taking care of her while H.J. attended the ball, and she realized that Harry or H.J. must have asked Hermione to do it. She also wondered why Camellia was calling Granger 'Aunt Hermione'.

Cassandra opened her mouth to say something but fell silent as Mione glared at her.

A little cheer came out of the room, and then Hermione's laughter laced voice reached the two girls again. "I think it's your turn for a kiss now, Cammie."

"Yuck." Mione and Cassandra both grinned at the disgust in Camellia's voice. "He's not kissing me like that."

Hermione's voice reached Mione's ears again. "That kind of kiss is just for special friends, Cammie. You get a kiss on the cheek, like this."

Seeing how white her friend had gone at Hermione's words, Cassandra grabbed her friend's hand and apparated them both out of the house.

Next chapter: Mione feels embarrassed; Faith gets turned down; Sirius makes a pleasant discovery.

Next chapter will be either tomorrow morning (Sunday) or Monday. Chapter 11 should be up by Monday night or Tuesday at the latest.

Chapter 10: Romance and Relief

24th December 2002

Hermione walked out of the room at the sound of a sharp crack. "Hello?" When no-one answered she walked back into the sitting to finish decorating the ceiling as Cammie had requested. "There's no-one there. I could have sworn I heard someone apparating."

Xander shrugged as he lifted Cammie up again so that she could hang more mistletoe up. "It's probably just the floorboards creaking." He then lowered Cammie to stand beneath the mistletoe she'd just hung. "So how about my kiss?"

Cammie gave a scream and a giggle as Xander blew a raspberry on her cheek. "Uncle Xander!"

Hermione looked at the time. "I think it's time you went to bed, young lady."

"Do I have to?" Cammie was having a great time and didn't want to go.

"H.J. said you had to be in bed by eleven, so you're already fifteen minutes late." Xander informed her. "Now hop on my back, and I'll carry you up."

Cammie gladly did as she was ordered, and Hermione smiled as she followed the two of them up the stairs. H.J. suddenly appeared at the top of the stairs. "I timed that just right, didn't I?"

Cammie gave a happy yell. "H.J.!"

The two men waited outside Cammie's room while Hermione kept her company as she changed into her pajamas. "You can come in now."

Xander and H.J. entered the room and both of them kissed Cammie goodnight, before going downstairs where they headed into the kitchen.

Upstairs Cammie lay back in her bed. "Aunt Hermione, will you sit and talk to me for a little while?"

Hermione could tell Cammie was still nervous about being in the house, and so she sat down beside her. After ten minutes Cammie's eyes were starting to droop so Hermione got up. "I think you should get some sleep now."

Cammie yawned. "You are going to sleep in here with me tonight aren't you?"

"I'll be here when you wake up." Hermione leant over and kissed her. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight." Cammie felt safe as she closed her eyes and went to sleep.

Hermione went downstairs to find the two men sitting with beers. H.J. immediately opened the fridge when she walked in. "Do you want a glass of wine?"

"Yes please." Hermione took the glass off H.J. once he filled it, and sat down at the counter.

"Was Cammie alright?" H.J. had started to get worried when Hermione didn't come straight back down.

Harry's voice interrupted the group. "She was asleep when I just checked in."

"I thought you were still at the ball with Mione." H.J. observed.

"I left about fifteen minutes ago. I'm surprised you didn't hear me in the shower." Harry got himself a glass of wine and sat down next to Xander. "I was hoping to speak to Cammie as I'd promised her a goodnight kiss when I got home but I probably should have seen her before I showered."

Hermione smiled as she thought about the young girl. "I feel so sorry for her. She's almost desperate for affection. From the way she acts,

if I hadn't known she was eleven, I'd have said she was only eight or nine at most."

"It doesn't help that she's really quite tiny which makes her seem younger." Xander pointed out. "But I know what you mean about the affection thing. We discussed it this morning while you were in her bedroom with her."

Hermione looked over at Harry. "I know Cammie wants me to stay but are you sure it's okay?"

"Of course." Harry reassured her. He knew that Hermione didn't realize how much alike she and Cammie were, particularly when it came down to reassurance. "I wouldn't have invited you to stay otherwise."

H.J. seconded Harry. "I'm glad he did. Cammie seems to have really taken to you."

"I must admit I'm pretty taken with her too." Hermione owned. "So I'm glad Harry came and got me."

Harry grinned. "You did look a little surprised to see me this morning."

Hermione had actually been almost speechless. "That's an understatement."

Earlier that day

H.J. watched Cammie open the small welcoming gifts he, Harry and Mione had bought for her to open on her first day in the house after he'd collected her from the home she'd been placed in until the legalities of her adoption had been finalized. H.J. had been a little surprised to find out that Hogwarts didn't stay open over Christmas, which was why Cammie had had to stay in the home. H.J. just hoped that she felt comfortable now. Looking at her face as she opened her first gift, he knew he'd made the right choice in offering to take her in.

Cammie could feel her hands shaking as she nervously opened her gift from Dudley. H.J. had decided to let her have it then rather than waiting for Christmas Day. "He sent me a necklace."

H.J. bent down to look at it. "It's very pretty."

Cammie looked nervously up at H.J. "Do you think he really cares?"

"I'd say so." H.J. was aware that Dudley was seeing a wizarding psychologist, and that this was probably something she'd suggested. "I've got his address, so if you want to send him a thank you card, we can do that."

"Thanks, H.J." Cammie smiled happily at H.J. She then opened Harry's present of assorted candies; she'd never been allowed much by her parents. "Thanks, Harry."

Mione had uncharacteristically sent Camellia some hair ribbons, as well as matching brushes and combs. "They're really pretty. I'll write her a thank you note."

Cammie left the final present, the one from H.J. until last. She carefully unwrapped it to reveal a piece of parchment paper which she quickly read. "So I can stay?"

Harry looked over at H.J., who was grinning madly at Cammie. "Is that what I think it is?"

"The final court order." H.J. confirmed, not taking his eyes of Cammie, who looked as if she was going to cry. "Are you happy?"

Cammie nodded her head and burst into tears. H.J. got up and pulled her onto his lap. "There, there."

Harry could see that H.J. wasn't exactly using to handling children but knew that he'd soon learn. "Congratulations."

"Thanks." H.J. stroked Cammie's hair as she sobbed into his sweater. "It's okay; no-one can take you away now."

Cammie lifted tear blurred eyes to H.J. "Does this mean that you're my Dad now?"

H.J. looked a little helplessly at Harry, who was trying to hide his smirk, before answering. "I think it does but you can still call me H.J. if you want to."

"I don't know." Cammie wanted to call him Dad but felt nervous about doing so.

"There's no hurry to decide what you want to call me." H.J. reassured the girl. "But you can call Harry, Uncle Harry if you want to."

For Cammie this was easier decision to make. "Can I really?"

"Of course." Harry didn't mind at all.

"In that case, I'll call you Uncle Harry. Should I call Mione, Aunt Mione or Professor Dominic?" Cammie felt nervous around Mione, as she knew that she was likely to become her teacher at some time in the future.

"I think you can her Aunt Mione at home and Professor Dominic when she's in school." H.J. climbed to his feet, still holding onto Cammie. "Now I think it's time for a late breakfast. I'm cooking pancakes and sausage. Who wants some?"

"Not for me." Harry got up. "I'll be back a little later."

"Can you get the milk and eggs for out for me? I'll be there in a minute." H.J. put Cammie down, and she obligingly ran off in the direction of the kitchen. "You're going to see Hermione Granger, aren't you?"

Harry nodded. "I'm worried about her being alone as she said that her parents were going away for Christmas. I was thinking of asking her back here. I'm also going to drop by and collect Xander a little earlier than I planned." H.J. and Harry had introduced Xander to Cammie while they were still at Hogwarts, and the two of them had bonded

almost immediately. Xander had therefore offered to take care of the young girl while H.J. and Harry attended the Ministry Ball that evening.

"I'll see you when you get back." H.J. frowned as Harry apparated away. A call returned his attention to the kitchen. "I'm coming, Cammie."

Harry walked out of the side alley and made his way up the street to the house he'd found out Hermione lived at.

Hermione had her head in a book when she heard a knock on the door. Padding to open it she was shocked to find Harry standing there. "Harry, err, what are you doing here?"

"Freezing." Harry shivered slightly.

"Sorry, come in." Hermione stepped aside to let Harry by. "Come through to the family room. I was just reading in there."

Harry followed Hermione into a large room with walls lined with books and several sofas arranged against them. A small television sat on a console. "Why aren't there any Christmas decorations?"

Hermione blushed. "Mother said it wasn't worth the expense as she and Edward wouldn't be here."

Harry could sense Hermione's nervousness as she talked about her parents, so he didn't comment any further on the subject. "I actually came over to see if you wanted to go with me to drop by and see Xander." Harry didn't tell her that they were then going to his home as he had the feeling she'd refused to go if he did.

Hermione's face lit up. "I'd love to. I've got a cake in the fridge that I can take with me."

"I'm sure Xander will like that." Harry knew that the American would never refuse food.

Ten minutes later Harry was knocking on Xander's door. Remus opened the door. "Harry, Miss. Granger."

Xander came running up behind Remus. "Come in."

"I thought I'd collect you a little early." Harry hoped Xander wouldn't mind.

"My bag is already packed." Xander informed him.

Harry grinned at Xander's enthusiasm. "I not sure if you've eaten breakfast yet but H.J. is cooking sausage and pancakes."

Xander's face split into a large grin. "It was going to be leftover pizza from last night as no-one's gone shopping."

Harry did the polite thing. "Remus, perhaps you and Rupert would care to join us for breakfast?"

Remus shook his head. "Thanks but Rupert has plans already, and I'm planning to catch up on some of my work."

"You can't work on Christmas Eve." Xander was horrified.

"I have to but I'm going to drop by the Ball later." Remus knew he'd enjoy the peace and quiet until then. "Now get off with you."

"I won't be a minute." Xander disappeared as he ran up the stairs to grab his stuff.

Rupert came into the hallway. "Harry, good to see you."

"Rupert." Harry liked the reserved but friendly man. "Remus said you have plans; not work I hope."

Rupert shook his head. "Most definitely not. I'm taking a friend out for brunch before we spend the day together."

"I hope you have a nice time." Harry wished Xander would hurry up as he could sense that Hermione was totally out of her comfort zone. He knew she hadn't expected to see Remus there, and he had a feeling she still had a crush on the Defense teacher.

"I'm sure we will." Rupert gave a brief smile to Hermione. "If you'll all excuse me."

Harry turned to Remus. "Is he alright?"

"He's nervous." Remus grinned. "He's liked our friend's daughter for ages and has never gotten the courage up to ask her out. She actually asked him in the end."

Harry laughed, and Hermione gave a nervous smile. Xander came running down the stairs bearing a bag. "Let's go. See you Remus."

Remus waved his hand as disappeared into his study, leaving the three of them standing in the hallway.

Harry grabbed Xander's arm, and then turned to Hermione. "I'm going to side apparate you both at the same time."

Xander didn't get a chance to protest as he soon found himself standing in a large hallway. Cammie heard the crack and ran out. "Uncle Harry, the pancakes are..." Her words died away at the sight of Hermione.

"Perhaps I'd better go." Hermione felt more uncomfortable than she had done when she'd come face to face with Remus outside of school.

"Please don't." It was Cammie who spoke up. "I'm Camellia Dur..., err Cammie Sebastian." Cammie had decided she preferred the diminutive form of her name that H.J. had begun to use.

"Hermione Granger." Hermione tentatively held out her hand, half-expecting Cammie to reject it.

Cammie shook it firmly. "I've seen you at school but my classmates told me I can't talk to you and the other Muggleborns."

"I think you'd better listen to them." Hermione didn't want Cammie to lose her friends. "But we can talk now if you want to."

Cammie grabbed Hermione's hand and dragged her into the kitchen. "Come have some breakfast. H.J.'s a great cook. I've already eaten two pancakes and three sausages."

H.J. waved over at Hermione and Xander. "Hi you two. There's plenty if you want some."

Xander pulled a plate off the stack that H.J. had warmed. "I'm not going to say no."

"Shocker!" Harry laughed at his friend. "Hermione, try one."

"I'll try half of one." Hermione acceded. "But no syrup."

"I don't like it either." Cammie confided. "But butter's nice on it."

After breakfast Cammie looked hopefully at H.J. "Can I show Hermione my bedroom?"

"I'm not sure she wants to see it." H.J. smiled apologetically at Hermione.

"I'd love to." Hermione followed a beaming Cammie out.

"Cammie seems to have latched onto Hermione terribly quickly." Xander noted. "She's still awfully anxious isn't she?"

"She is." H.J. set up a ward so he could hear if Cammie returned but she couldn't hear them. "Her parents treated her like shit. At the moment she's really clingy but I can understand that."

"After what Harry told me, I can see why you took her in." Xander had immediately liked the young girl when he'd first been introduced to her.

"After meeting her when I went to collect her, it just felt right." H.J. gave a wry smile. "But I have to be honest, I never in a million years expected to end up becoming a Dad at such an early age."

"You'll do just fine." Harry assured H.J. "Now, why don't I get everyone a drink and we can watch some TV."

Xander was pleased that the house H.J. had bought, to provide Cammie with a stable homelife, was in a Muggle neighborhood of Birmingham, and that they had a big screen TV. "Giles refuses to have one in the house."

"You don't say." Harry laughed as he passed out beer to Xander and a glass of wine to H.J. "I know it's a little early but it is Christmas Eve."

Xander twisted the lid off the bottle of beer. "Happy holidays."

"The same to you." H.J. took a small sip of wine before putting the glass down. "I don't want to drink too much in front of Cammie."

"Welcome to parenthood." Harry felt a bittersweet shaft of pain as he thought about his own children.

H.J. gave Harry an understanding glance but could do little more than that, as he knew that Harry had decided to put off telling Xander and Hermione about them until Mione agreed to it.

An hour later Hermione and Cammie came back down. Cammie sat down next to H.J. "Hermione said I can call her Aunt Hermione, if I want to."

Cammie looked hopefully at Xander. "Can I call you Uncle Xander?"

Xander winked with his good eye at the girl. "You can call me whatever you want to, as long as it's not Cyclops, or worse, Mr. Harris."

Camellia giggled at Xander. "You're funny."

H.J. turned to Hermione. "Can I speak to you in the kitchen?"

Hermione followed H.J. out. "Is it about Cammie calling me Aunt? I can ask her not to, if you want."

H.J. put a hand on Hermione's arm. "Calm down. I'm glad she feels that comfortable around you. I know we really haven't talked much but I have a favor to ask of you."

Hermione was a little unsure of what she could do for H.J. "Do you want me to tidy up in here?"

H.J. frowned. "Hermione, you're not a house-elf." He softened his voice as Hermione visibly recoiled. "You're a guest in this house, not a servant. What I wanted to ask was if you'd mind staying over with Xander to watch Cammie tonight. I trust him but I'd feel better knowing that you're here. She seems to have taken to you."

Hermione relaxed. "I'd love to."

H.J. realized Hermione hadn't got a drink. "Would you like a glass of wine?"

Hermione shook her head. "It's a little early for me but I wouldn't say no to a cup of tea."

"I'll make one for you." H.J. pulled open the cupboard and got out a cup and teabags before reaching into the fridge and getting out the milk. "Do you want sugar?"

"No thanks." Hermione felt awkward standing around while H.J. ran around after her. "I could have done it, you know."

"It's the least I can do." H.J. tapped the side of the mug and passed it to Hermione. "I hope that it's okay."

Hermione took a tentative sip. "It's perfect, thank you."

"Come on. Let's go back in." H.J. placed his hand at the small of Hermione's back and led her back to the sitting room.

It was obvious that Cammie had been worried that Hermione had left. "I thought you'd gone."

"No, I'm staying tonight." Hermione smiled as Cammie moved to sit by her.

"You can sleep in my room with me." Now Hermione had said she'd stay, the young girl had every intention of making sure she'd stayed as long as possible.

"I look forward to it." Hermione reassured her. "Now why don't we settle down and watch the movie?"

Cammie snuggled up to Hermione's side feeling the most loved she'd ever felt.

Present Time

Mione was shaking as she looked round the room Cassandra had apparated her into. "Where are we?"

"My bedroom." Cassandra realized that Mione hadn't been in it yet. "It was the first place I thought of."

"No wonder Harry didn't want to stay tonight." Mione felt miserable. "He wanted to get back home to be with her."

"I doubt he was doing anything, Mione." Cassandra put her arm around her friend. "Camellia was there with them."

"You heard them; he kissed her." Mione felt sick. "He assured me everything would be alright before he left the ball, and then he went off and kissed someone else."

"Haven't you ever kissed someone under the mistletoe?" Cassandra hoped that there was innocent explanation.

"Yes, but this is different." Mione argued. "And I know he wasn't kissing her on the cheek."

"Mione, that doesn't mean a thing." Cassandra tried to reassure her friend. "Harry Potter kissed me under the mistletoe last year, and it wasn't on my cheek, but it doesn't mean we're sleeping together."

You've already said that Harry only views Hermione Granger as a friend. ”

Mione wasn't sure that she truly believed that. “I hope you're right.” Mione knew that she couldn't stay in the bedroom forever, and took a deep breath to steady herself. “I think we'd better get back to the Ball.”

“Do you feel up to it?” Cassandra knew she could send a house-elf to James Potter with a message if necessary.

“I'm alright.” Mione smiled brightly at Cassandra. “Before we go, tell me, what was it like being kissed by Potter?”

Cassandra gagged. “Bloody horrible.”

“So why did you do it?” Mione asked.

“I didn't kiss him, he kissed me because Orion dared him to.” Cassandra shuddered. “Not quite how I pictured my first kiss.”

“At least you didn't embarrass yourself trying to get a kiss.” Mione held out her hand. “Apparate me back to the Ministry and I'll tell you.”

Cassandra apparated them both back. “So tell me then.”

“Do you remember I told you that Dae and I were engaged?” Mione watched her friend nod. “Well, we were at a ball at Hogwarts and I saw Harry with Chang. I ended up begging Dae to kiss me to try and make Harry jealous.”

Cassandra gripped Mione's hand tightly. “And?”

“And he turned me down flat.” Mione shuddered. “I'm quite glad he did now, especially as he turned out to be my uncle.”

Cassandra giggled. “I know what you mean. It would be like me begging Uncle Remus to kiss me.”

Mione giggled as well. “Well, I can't say I'd mind that.”

“And what are you two up to?” Remus’ voice interrupted the two girls.

Cassandra went bright red. “Nothing.”

Remus didn’t let on he’d caught the final part of their conversation. “As long as you’re alright.”

Cassandra relaxed. “We’re fine. We’re just going to find Orion and Katherine.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow night then.” Remus kissed Cassandra on the cheek before doing the same to Mione. “Goodnight.”

Mione waited for Remus to apparate away before turning to Cassandra. “Oh Merlin, do you think he heard us?”

“No. He’d have had to have bloody good hearing to be able to hear us over this lot.” Cassandra reassured Mione.

Mione dropped her head on Cassandra’s shoulder. “I’m so embarrassed.”

Cassandra didn’t know about Remus’ abilities, and thought that Mione was embarrassed because Remus had kissed her. “It was just a kiss on the cheek, Mione.”

Mione couldn’t let her onto to her friend what was really bothering her and decided to go with Cassandra’s supposition. “It’s just that he’s a colleague as well as my teacher.”

Grabbing Mione’s hand, Cassandra dragged her back into the ballroom. “Stop worrying about it. I’m sure Uncle Remus isn’t.”

Just as the girls were about to go back in, they came face to face with Sirius and Faith. “Dad.”

“Hi Cassie.” Sirius smiled affectionately at his daughter. “I’ve finally managed to get away. What are you doing out here?”

"Saying goodbye to Remus." Hermione didn't want Sirius knowing that they'd left the ball.

"That's nice of you." Sirius took Faith's hand and pulled her closer. "I'll see you both at home. Don't forget to make sure you bring Orion back with you when James is ready to leave."

"I won't, Dad." Cassandra then turned and continued back into the ballroom, towing Mione behind her.

After making sure that Cassandra had gone back in, Sirius let go of Faith's hand and stood behind her before sliding his arm around her waist. "Hold still; this might take a few moments as the wards will have to accept you."

Faith wasn't keen on apparating even though she'd been side-apparated quite a few times before by both Remus and H.J. "Okay."

After what felt like an eternity, Faith gasped as they materialized in Sirius' hallway. "I thought you said a few moments."

"Sorry, sometimes it takes longer than that." Sirius wasn't really bothered by the feeling but he knew that others weren't so keen. "Come through to the kitchen."

Faith followed Sirius and whistled. "This is some joint."

"It's just home." Sirius rarely thought about the luxury he lived in; he simply took it for granted. "I also own an estate in Cheshire but I let my brother and his family use it." Even though Sirius hadn't spoken to Regulus in over twenty years, he'd never rescinded the offer of using Black Manor as Sirius didn't particularly like the estate anyway. "Would you prefer wine or champagne?"

"Champagne." Faith loved the way the bubbles tickled her tongue.

Sirius disappeared through a door before returning a few minutes later with a bottle of red wine and several bottles of champagne. "Let me pour you a glass, and then I'll show you around if you're interested."

“I’m interested.” Faith took the glass of champagne from Sirius and took a sip, before groaning in appreciation. “That’s some champagne.”

“It’s from my vineyard in France.” Sirius kept most of the champagne he produced for himself and his friends. Sirius held out his hand. “Come on.”

As she let Sirius pull her along, Faith was surprised at the size of the house, and more so by the massive conservatory. “How big is this place?”

“Well let’s just say that it’s a lot bigger on the inside than it appears outside.” Sirius grinned. “But magic goes a long way in helping with that.”

As they walked along the top corridor, Faith glanced at the paintings that hung on the walls. “Ancestors?”

“Sadly but they’re part and parcel of the house. Which is why I banished them up here to the top floor where there’s little except for a dueling room and storage.” Sirius led the way back down. “So what do you think?”

“It sucks.” Faith laughed at the slightly surprised look on Sirius’ face. “Don’t be dumb; who wouldn’t be impressed by this kind of money?”

Sirius frowned. “I didn’t show you around to boast. This is just simply home to me.”

Faith had a feeling that Sirius wasn’t lying. “I’ll go with that.” She smiled playfully at him. “So which room is yours?”

“This one.” Sirius opened the door to the master suite.

Faith liked the feeling of comfort that Sirius had managed to inject into the room as she walked around it. “Nice.”

Sirius started to walk back towards the door. “Thanks.”

Faith didn't follow him. "But I thought..."

Sirius knew exactly what Faith thought, and returned to where she was standing before putting down his glass of wine. He then slipped his arms around her waist pulling her back against his chest, and dipped his head to nuzzle gently at her neck. "You thought that we were going to sleep together, didn't you?"

"Huh, huh." Faith was enjoying the sensations that Sirius' mouth was invoking.

Sirius let his mouth trail up to Faith's earlobe, before whispering quietly in her ear. "I'd like nothing more than to have you lying on that bed under me while you cry out my name, but it's not going to happen. Not tonight anyway."

Faith pulled away. "But you knew what I expected when you invited me back here."

"I did." Sirius admitted as he picked up his wineglass again. "But I'm not like the boys you sleep with, Faith."

Faith suddenly realized that Sirius must know exactly who she was. "You knew who I was before H.J. introduced me, didn't you?"

"I'm head of Auror Division, Faith." Sirius took a mouthful of wine. "Do you really think I'd just let someone without any wizarding credentials just waltz into Hogwarts without checking them out first?"

"So you know what I did?" Faith asked tersely.

"I do, and I've spoken to Remus about it. I also know that you were willing to do the time for it." Sirius believed in second chances. "Tell me, would you change what you did if you could?"

Faith answered honestly. "No, because if I did, I probably wouldn't be the person I am today."

Sirius admired Faith for being honest. "But do you regret it?"

Faith didn't hesitate. "Yes."

"That's good enough for me then." Sirius looked contemplatively at Faith. "So now you've got a choice. I'm not going to sleep with you tonight, so we can either finish this before it goes anywhere..."

Faith raised an eyebrow. "Or?"

"Or, we can see where things go." Sirius could see that Faith was unsure of what to do. "If you choose the latter option, I'll take you out to dinner where we can talk and get to know each a little better."

"I don't do the whole dinner thing." Faith protested.

Sirius decided to be blunt. "If you want to sleep with me, then we do the whole dinner thing. I'm not the type of man who sleeps around indiscriminately."

Faith immediately became defensive. "What you're trying to say is that I do, aren't you?"

"I didn't say that." Sirius did know, however, that Faith would assume that from his statement. "All I'm saying is that before I sleep with a woman, I like to have some sort of intellectual and emotional connection with her."

Faith started to walk back towards the door. "I've just ditched one guy for complaining about a lack of an emotional connection. I simply don't do it."

"Fair enough." Sirius followed Faith out of the room.

Faith stopped outside the room. "What's the big deal about being emotionally connected anyway?"

Sirius hid his smile; he knew now that Faith was still interested contrary to her avowal otherwise. "Would it be so difficult to sit opposite me and simply eat a meal?"

"No, but..." Faith was cut off.

"So let's try it." Sirius suggested. "I'll take you out to dinner on New Year's Eve. If you don't like it, you can simply leave."

Faith pretended to consider Sirius' offer, and took her time to answer. "Okay but I'm out of there if it isn't working out."

"That's fair." Sirius led Faith downstairs. "Let's have another glass of champagne."

Faith wasn't going to turn down champagne and followed Sirius back into the kitchen and sat down on a barstool. "If we're going to do this emotional crap, can I ask you something?"

Sirius nodded as he poured out more champagne for Faith. "Ask away."

"Are you divorced?" Faith had spotted photos of Sirius and a fair-haired woman in his bedroom.

"No, I'm a widower." Sirius topped up his own glass. "Eleanor died giving birth to Orion."

Faith was a little shocked. "But I thought your kind of magic could do anything."

Sirius closed his eyes as he remembered Orion's birth, before opening them to look at Faith again. "Not that time."

"Sorry." Faith didn't know what else to say. "So you live alone in this place with your kids?"

"Most of the time they're at school, so I quite often sleep over at the office if I can't be bothered to come back home." Sirius sometimes didn't finish with his paperwork until the early hours of the morning.

"You obviously work too hard." Faith got up off the stool. "But I know a really good cure for that."

"I bet you do." Sirius slipped his arms around Faith's waist. "But I'm still not sleeping with you tonight. Not even if you paraded naked in front of me." Sirius gave a barking laugh. "Well, maybe I'd change my mind then."

Faith burst out laughing just as Katherine apparated into the kitchen with Orion. Cassandra appeared moments later, Mione holding onto her arm. James finally apparated in alone.

James hid his dislike of Faith. Remus had introduced them earlier that night and James had found that he didn't really like her. "Care to share the joke?"

"Not particularly." Faith didn't like James anymore than he liked her.

Sirius took Faith by the hand. "Let's go into the sitting room."

"I'm actually going to head home." James yawned. "I've done my duty and delivered the kids."

Sirius frowned. "I thought you were going to stay the night."

"With this noisy lot? You're on your own, mate." James kissed Katherine on the cheek. "I'll see you in the morning."

"Night Dad." Katherine then turned to chatter happily to her friends.

James nodded politely at Faith and shook hands with Sirius. "I'll see you after breakfast."

"Night." Sirius could tell something was wrong with James but he didn't want to ask in front of their children.

Faith suddenly felt a little out of place. "Perhaps I'd better be off."

"Have you got somewhere you need to be?" Sirius knew that she didn't, even as he asked.

"No, but I don't want to intrude." Faith couldn't believe she was being so polite.

“You’re hardly intruding.” Sirius put an arm around Faith’s shoulders. “Kids, this is Faith. Faith, you already know Cassandra. Katherine is James’ daughter, Orion is mine and I think you already know Mione Dominic.”

Faith tipped her head. “Hi.”

Katherine, Orion and Mione all politely greeted Faith. Cassandra just ignored her. “Dad, do we have any orange juice?”

As it was Christmas Eve, Sirius decided to treat her. “Cassie, forget about the orange juice for you girls. You can take a bottle of champagne up with you instead. Orion, no you can’t have a glass.”

“Can he just have half a glass, Dad?” Cassandra looked pleadingly at her Dad.

“Make sure it is only half.” Sirius warned. “And no more than one glass each for you and Katherine.”

“What about Mione?” Katherine felt a little annoyed that Sirius hadn’t included Mione in his statement.

“Mione’s a teacher, and can do what she likes.” Sirius knew that it would irk both Katherine and Cassandra but he really had no jurisdiction over what Cassandra’s friend did.

“One glass will be fine with me.” Mione decided to stop the controversy there and then.

“Now that’s sorted, off to bed.” Sirius ordered.

Cassandra grabbed the unopened bottle of the counter. “Katherine, get some glasses; we’ll use the large guest room.”

“That’s great.” Katherine knew that the three girls would probably end up sharing the same room.

Sirius waited for the girls and Orion to leave before addressing Faith. "Do you want to stay tonight?"

Faith hesitated. "But it's Christmas tomorrow."

"That's okay." Sirius grinned. "I've got lots of people coming over so you aren't going to be in the way, in case that's what you're worried about."

"I'll stay then." Faith didn't fancy being apparated after the amount of champagne she'd drunk. "Do you have a spare room?"

"Faith, I know I didn't take you into every room but this place has ten bedrooms, so I think I can find a guest room for you." Sirius let Faith go and started to walk towards the cellar door. "Let me just grab some more champagne for you, and we'll go to my room."

"You are so confusing." Faith admitted. "You won't sleep with me but you want me to go up to your room with you."

Sirius laughed and accioed another bottle of champagne from the cellar. "We're just going to talk but I'd prefer to do it somewhere more comfortable than down here."

"Oh." Faith was hoping that Sirius had changed his mind.

"Come on." Sirius led the way back to his bedroom. Once inside, Sirius opened the door to his closet and pulled out a shirt. "You can wear this to sleep in or I can transfigure what you're wearing."

"No, this will do fine." Faith grabbed the shirt Sirius held out. "Where's my room?"

"Through that door." Sirius pointed to a room that adjoined the master suite. "It used to be Orion's but when he turned six, he demanded a bigger room."

Faith walked through the door and looked around the room. The bedroom was small but adequate. "Do you put all of your lady friends up here?"

"You're the first woman I've had to stay over." Sirius admitted.

Faith's mouth dropped open. "You mean you haven't slept with anyone since your wife died?"

Sirius burst out laughing at Faith's incorrect assumption. "Of course I have; I've just never had anyone to stay over. I prefer to keep my family life private from my dating life. I'd never have dreamt of having anyone stay over when the kids were smaller."

"So why am I here?" Faith took a mouthful of champagne and opened the other door in the guest room.

"Because it was Orion's first proper date tonight, and I decided that the kids were both now old enough to know that I have a life outside of them." Sirius knew he was stretching things with the first date comment, but he was still hopeful.

"Do they know that you've dated?" In contrast to her own normal behavior, Faith found that she was actually interested in listening to what Sirius had to say.

"Of course but I've never introduced them to any of the women I've dated." Sirius hadn't wanted to do that unless he knew it was going to go somewhere. He didn't know why but with Faith it felt different.

"And do you consider us to be dating?" Faith asked quietly.

"How do things stand between you and H.J.?" Sirius assumed that they were over but he wanted to make sure.

"We've slept together a few times but it didn't work out." Faith gave a brief smile. "He wanted to do the emotional thing and I didn't but we are friends."

"In that case we're dating." Sirius finally answered Faith's question. "However, there a few ground rules."

Faith folded her arms and smirked. "Aren't there always?"

"It looks that way." Sirius grinned at her. "My number one rule is that if you're dating me, that's it. You're dating me, and only me."

Faith nodded her head slightly. "Exclusivity; I get it."

Sirius thought for a moment. "If for any reason you can't make a date, let me know."

"Keep you informed." Faith nodded again.

"And most importantly, never lie to me." Sirius hated dishonesty. "If it isn't working out, or you don't want to do something, then tell me. I might not like it but I'd rather be told the truth."

Faith went red. "I get it."

"Good." Sirius was more than aware of Faith's track record. "Now, before we talk anymore, do you want to take a shower?"

"Yes." Faith picked up her glass and the shirt, and headed into the small en-suite off the small bedroom. Finding towels on the side, she stripped off to get into the shower before she realized there was a problem. Grabbing one of the towels, she wrapped it around herself, and stepped back out into the bedroom where Sirius was sitting on a chair. "How do you make the water run?"

Sirius got up and walked into the bathroom. "Sorry, I forgot you're a Muggle. How do you like your shower?"

"Between warm to hot." Faith ran a hand through her hair. "And you wouldn't have a comb and a hairdryer would you?"

Sirius barked out a laugh. "A comb I can provide but I'll have to do a drying spell on your hair."

"That's fine." Faith waited for Sirius to leave before stepping into the shower; the water was perfect. After ten minutes she finally stepped out and dried herself off. A comb and a toothbrush were sitting on the counter. Faith shivered a little as the silk shirt slithered over her

naked body. After combing her hair and brushing her teeth, she made her way back into the bedroom.

Sirius felt his mouth go dry at the sight of Faith in his shirt. "Come here."

Faith could feel her heart begin to beat faster at the look on Sirius' face. "The shower's still running."

"Turn around." Sirius almost regretted his decision not to sleep with her.

Faith felt her hair dry almost instantaneously. "Great trick."

"It's just a simple spell." Sirius walked into the bathroom before spelling off the shower. "I've put a robe on my bed for you."

Faith walked into Sirius' bedroom and picked up the deep red toweling robe and slid it on. "It's a little big."

Sirius laughed as the robe swamped Faith. "Allow me."

Faith felt the robe shorten until it fit her perfectly. "Thanks."

"I'll be out shortly." Sirius headed into his own bathroom.

Faith burst out laughing as she heard Sirius swear a few minutes later. She had a feeling that he was taking a cold shower. Picking up her glass of champagne, she sat down on the sofa in front of the large blazing fire.

Sirius came out in his pajama bottoms and picked up a second robe and slipped it on. "Do you want more champagne?"

"Thanks." Faith leant forward to hold out her glass.

As she did, Sirius touched Faith's face. "You look so young without make-up on."

"I'm not surprised as I wouldn't exactly call 23 old." Faith felt vulnerable without any make-up.

"23?" Sirius frowned. "But your profile said 33."

"It got it wrong then." Faith felt a little insulted. "You really thought I was 33?"

"I just thought that you were a really young looking 33." Sirius protested.

"So I'm a little younger than you thought." Faith could see that Sirius was being genuine. "It's not exactly a big deal."

"I'm 42." Sirius put down the champagne bottle. "You're only five years older than Cassandra."

"Holy shit. You're really 42?" Faith leant forward.

"Yes." Sirius felt a little uncomfortable under Faith's scrutiny. "How old did you think I was?"

"I don't know... 35, 36 max, and only that age because of Cassandra." Faith looked even more closely at Sirius' face. "You look young as well."

"Wizarding genes." Sirius explained.

"Would you have invited me back here if you'd known my real age?" Faith had a feeling that he wouldn't have.

"No, I wouldn't." Sirius wasn't going lie.

"So do you want me to go?" Faith wanted to see how truthful Sirius really could be.

"No, I don't." Sirius had meant it when he'd said that he preferred the truth. "In spite of finding out how old you are, I like you."

"Good, 'cause I kind of like you too." Faith yawned. "So what now?"

“Do you want to talk some more, or would you like to go to sleep?” Sirius could see that Faith was obviously tired.

“Sleep I think.” Faith got up. “So before I go, do I get a goodnight kiss?”

Not trusting himself to take things too far, Sirius refused. “Not tonight.”

“I didn’t think so.” Faith blew Sirius a kiss and swayed her hips as she walked into the room Sirius had given her. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Sirius waited for the door to shut before letting out a small groan. At this rate he’d need a second cold shower.

After leaving Faith and Sirius alone, Cassandra headed up for the large guest suite that had been set aside for Katherine and Mione. Once she’d closed the door, she opened the bottle of champagne and poured out glasses for everyone. “So, what does everyone think of the skank Dad’s sleeping with?”

Mione choked on her champagne. “Cassandra, that isn’t very kind. You don’t even know Faith.”

Katherine was on Mione’s side. “I admit I’m not exactly fond of her but Mione’s right.”

Cassandra pouted a little. “But Dad’s never brought anyone home before, and I know she was dating H.J. They were even at the ball together.”

“And I was there with Orion, but that doesn’t mean anything.” Katherine didn’t quite meet Cassandra’s eyes as she spoke, something Mione noticed but didn’t comment on.

Cassandra let out a whistling breath. “I suppose you’re right.”

Orion sat down on one of the beds. “Cass, Dad’s been on his own for so long, so don’t you think he deserves someone?”

"Yes, but I wish it wasn't her." Cassandra complained then gave a rueful smile. "I sound like a spoilt brat, don't I?"

"A little." Mione said gently. "But I think you're used to having your Dad to yourself, aren't you?"

"Yes." Cassandra sat down heavily on the bed next to her brother. "I want him to be happy but I expected him to pick someone more like Aunt Carrie or Aunt Lily."

"You can't live Dad's life for him, Cass." Orion patted Cassandra a little awkwardly on the back. "Faith doesn't exactly seem like the type to stick around, so just grit your teeth and smile."

"For a little brother, you're alright you know." Cassandra kissed Orion on the cheek making him grimace. "Now then, tell me where you and Katherine got to this evening."

Orion went very red. "We were just on the far side of the gardens as neither of us like the crowds."

"And that's it?" Cassandra looked carefully at Katherine's face. "Orion looks awfully guilty."

"That's because I gave him half a glass of champagne when I know I shouldn't have." Katherine looked a little guilty as well. "It didn't seem fair that I had a glass and he didn't."

"I'm not exactly going to tell Dad." Cassandra grinned. "Anyway, Dad said he could have half a glass."

Orion grinned back at his sister. "So I'm going to be allowed more?"

"You can have this half glass and that's it." Cassandra wasn't going to tell on Orion but she also wasn't going to deliberately give him more than Sirius had said she could. "Consider this a Christmas favor."

"Fair enough." Orion knew that Cassandra wouldn't back down once she'd made up her mind.

The group chatted for several hours until finally Orion left, and the three girls, as Katherine thought they would, ended up bunking together.

The Next Morning – Harry's Home

Cammie woke up to find Hermione in bed with her. Cammie felt guilty as she'd obviously hogged all the covers and Hermione had nothing covering her at all. As Cammie went to pull the cover over the sleeping Hermione, she was horrified to see massive bruises on Hermione's back where the pajamas Harry had loaned her had ridden up. After covering Hermione up, Cammie crept quietly out of the room and headed for H.J.'s bedroom.

Once she was outside the door, Cammie found she was unsure as to whether she should wake H.J. or not. Plucking up her courage, she tapped softly on the door and pushed it slowly open. "H.J.?"

H.J. groaned and slowly opened his eyes. As Cammie hesitantly called out his name again, H.J. came fully awake and shot up in bed. "Is something wrong?"

Cammie stood nervously in the doorway bouncing from one foot to the other. "Can I come in?"

"Close the door behind you." H.J. got out of bed and slung his robe around Cammie. "What's wrong?"

"I think I've done something awful." Cammie could feel tears threatening.

H.J. knelt down. "You can tell me anything, Cammie. I promise I'll always listen."

"It's Aunt Hermione." Cammie went to reach out to touch H.J. but hesitated.

H.J. realized that Cammie needed to be held and gently tugged her by wrist until she was wrapped up in his arms, her head hidden in his neck. "What about Hermione?"

"I think I hurt her." Cammie started to cry.

"What do you mean?" H.J. couldn't see how Cammie could have hurt her.

"I think I did accidental magic on her." Cammie sobbed. "She's got bruises all over her back."

"Stay here." H.J. picked Cammie up and popped her into his bed. "I'll be back in a minute."

H.J. crept along the landing and opened the door to Cammie's room; Hermione was still fast asleep. Casting a sleeping spell to make sure she stayed that way, H.J. slowly pulled back the covers. Harry's voice made him jump. "What the hell are you playing at, H.J.?"

H.J. was glad he'd had the foresight to cast a spell on Hermione as he span round. "It's not what it looks like. Cammie came into my room crying that she's hurt Hermione. I'm just checking."

Harry stood over the bed as H.J. gently pushed up the back of Hermione's pajama top and gasped at the black and blue mass that covered Hermione's back. "How on earth did that happen?"

"Cammie thinks she did accidental magic on her but unless she picked up a belt and beat Hermione with it, I don't think that that's the case." H.J. rolled Hermione's pajama top back down and covered her up. "I think we're going to have to have a talk with Hermione. I need to get back to Cammie. Let's get out and I'll drop the sleeping spell I've put on Hermione."

H.J. and Harry made their way into H.J.'s room where Cammie was curled up crying in H.J.'s bed. H.J. held out his arms and she shot out of the bed and into them. "Cammie, you didn't do it."

Cammie looked unbelievably at H.J. "But they weren't there last night. I know because I woke up when Hermione was getting undressed."

"They were." Harry reassured Cammie. "I think Hermione was wearing something called a glamour but it must have faded when she was asleep."

"Someone else hurt her?" Cammie was almost as upset again at the news.

"I think so and I'm going to find out who." H.J. kissed Cammie on the forehead. "Why don't you go get showered, and I'll make breakfast before we open presents."

"I'm not very hungry." Cammie felt miserable.

H.J. decided the shower could wait. "Stay here with Uncle Harry then. I'm going to wake Hermione up."

Harry frowned. "Are you sure you don't want me to do it?"

"Harry, you'll just fly into a temper." H.J. knew how angry Harry would get. "I'll deal with it."

Cammie let Harry pick her up and carry her downstairs. H.J. made his way across the landing and knocked loudly on Hermione's door.

Hermione opened her eyes and pulled on a robe before opening the door. "H.J., am I late for breakfast?"

"Can I come in?" H.J. ignored her question.

"Of course." Hermione wondered what H.J. wanted. "I take it Cammie couldn't wait to see what Santa had brought her."

"Not exactly." H.J. looked Hermione in the eye. "She came in crying to me this morning saying that she'd hurt you, Hermione. She saw your back."

Hermione's hand automatically went to touch it. "I don't know what you mean."

"I've seen it, Hermione. I came to check on you after she told me." H.J. admitted. "So who did it?"

Hermione sank onto the bed and looked down at the floor. "It was an accident."

"No, Hermione, it wasn't." H.J. sat down beside her. "I know strap marks when I see them."

"It was my own fault." Hermione began to chew her lip. "Edward was angry at me for having to replace my potions textbook."

"Who's Edward?" H.J. had no idea who Hermione was talking about.

"My stepfather." Hermione refused to look at H.J. "He said that I shouldn't have left the book lying around, and that I was a thoughtless idiot who must believe that money grows on trees."

"Hermione, no-one should beat someone for forgetting to pick up a book." H.J. was disgusted. "Didn't your mum do anything to stop him?"

Hermione gave a bitter laugh. "She hates me."

"Because you're magical?" H.J. thought it might be for the same reason the Dursleys had hated him.

"No, because I exist." Hermione finally lifted her head to look at H.J. "She didn't want me but my Dad begged her to go through with the pregnancy. He died when I was two. Mother's always telling me I ruined her life just like my Dad. So when I found out I was a witch I was delighted that I was getting the chance to live somewhere else. I didn't care that Muggleborns weren't treated all that nicely at Hogwarts. I just knew it had to be better than being at home."

"And is it?" H.J. asked gently.

"Yes." Hermione admitted. "As bad as it is for me at Hogwarts, and as much as I hate it, it's still better than being at home. And I know that my parents are happier when I'm not there." Hermione went back to chewing on her lip. "They practically count down to the days to when I have to return to Hogwarts."

H.J. knew what he was going to do. "You're not going back."

"I've got to. I have to attend all seven years." Hermione protested.

"I meant to your house." H.J. realized she'd misunderstood him. "You're moving in here."

"Mione doesn't like me." Hermione knew how Harry's girlfriend felt about her, even though Harry had never said anything.

"She's not here, and to be perfectly frank, I don't care." H.J. knew he couldn't in all good conscience allow Hermione to return home. "I'm sure Cammie will be happy to share her room with you."

"I can't do that." Hermione wanted to but she didn't want to be a burden.

"You can and you will." H.J. stood up. "I know it's Christmas Day but we're going to pack your things up and you're moving in today."

A knock sounded on the door and Harry came into the room. "Cammie's watching TV with Xander."

"Hermione's moving in, Harry." H.J. informed him. "I'm going to take her home to help her pack and we'll be back soon."

Harry knew Hermione's home life had to be bad for H.J. to make the offer. "She can have my room."

H.J. shook his head. "I've already said she can share with Cammie."

Harry knew that his new niece wouldn't mind. "I'll sort out this room so it's ready for when you get back."

Hermione felt like crying at the two men's kindness. "I don't know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything." Harry smiled at the girl. "I'll tell Cammie. She'll probably want to help me get this room sorted."

As Harry closed the door behind him, H.J. realized that he hadn't healed Hermione's back. "Hermione, I'm going to get some salve and I'll deal with your back. Take off your top and put the sheet around you."

Hermione was grateful for H.J.'s offer. Even though she was eighteen and, as such, could do magic outside of Hogwarts, she hadn't been able to heal her own back as she'd have needed someone to rub salve into it as H.J. had offered to.

When H.J. returned, Hermione had done as he'd asked. "I promise I'll be as gentle as I can."

"I trust you." Despite her words, Hermione couldn't help shaking.

"Can you kneel on the bed?" H.J. could see that Hermione was feeling uncomfortable and a little scared, so he kept his voice gentle and low.

Hermione knelt on the bed, her cheeks flaming as H.J. began to tend to her back. "Ouch."

H.J. had known it was going to hurt and stopped. "I'm sorry but I can't cast a numbing spell or give you a potion just yet; it will counteract the salve."

"I was just taken unawares." Hermione braced herself as H.J. once more began to gently rub the salve over her back.

H.J. finished as quickly as he could and got up. "We need to give that a little while to sink in. Once it has, I can give you a pain potion."

Hermione just nodded. She couldn't speak as she didn't want H.J. to know that she was crying.

H.J., however, had already guessed. "I'll let you get dressed before coming back with that potion for you in a few minutes."

Leaving Hermione alone, H.J. walked downstairs and into the sitting room. As soon as she spotted him, Cammie pulled away from Xander, who'd been comforting the girl. "Is Hermione going to be alright?"

"She is, Cammie." H.J. reassured the girl. "Did Harry tell you she's going to be moving in with us?"

Cammie's smile could have lit up a building. "And that she's going to be sharing with me."

"I'm glad you're happy about it." H.J. kissed Cammie on the top of her forehead. "Now, I'm going to take Hermione home to pack and you can help Harry and Xander get the room ready. Okay?"

"Okay." Cammie agreed.

H.J. then made his way back upstairs to get Hermione sorted.

Grimmauld Place

At the same time Cammie was making her discovery, Katherine was letting herself quietly out of the bedroom. Making her way downstairs, she found breakfast had already been laid out by the house elves. Grabbing a glass of orange juice, she headed out into the conservatory.

After rounding the bend on the far side, she found Orion sitting on a bench. "I thought I'd be alone."

"I couldn't sleep." Orion wouldn't look at Katherine.

Katherine sat down next to him. "Orion, why won't you look at me? You were alright last night in the bedroom with the girls."

"I don't really know what to say now we're alone." Orion still didn't look at Katherine.

“Orion, it was just a kiss.” Katherine nudged him gently. “Are you feeling guilty because of Luna?”

“I always thought I really liked her but you looked really pretty last night so I didn't really notice she wasn't there.” Consumed by nerves, Orion babbled out a response. “I had a nice time when I didn't think I would but I really shouldn't have kissed you without asking.”

“I liked it.” Katherine admitted, blushing as she did so.

Orion finally looked at Katherine. “But I must have been really awful.” Orion felt a little embarrassed that he'd reached sixteen and last night had been his first real kiss.

“No. You weren't.” Katherine grinned conspiratorially at Orion. “When Roger Davies kissed me, it was like kissing a wet fish.”

Orion pulled a face and laughed as Katherine had hoped he would. “So I'm better than he was?”

“Most definitely.” Katherine reassured him.

Orion let out his breath with a whoosh, and asked the question that had been keeping him up all night, his words rushing out in a torrent. “So do you think you might like to be my date for the party tomorrow?” Sirius was holding the annual Boxing Day party that he always organized.

Katherine wasn't sure if Orion was asking to taunt their parents or because he really wanted to take her. She decided to find out, and asked lightly. “Are you doing this to tease Uncle Sirius?”

Orion went very red and looked down. “No, I really really like you.”

Katherine found that she was both relieved and happy about Orion's answer, something she hadn't expected. “I'm glad.”

At Katherine's response, Orion met her eyes. “So am I.”

Katherine blushed a little. "Do you want to go back in yet?"

Orion shook his head and moved a little closer. "I'd like to stay here."

Katherine could feel butterflies in her stomach beginning to make themselves known. "I forgot to say to say Merry Christmas."

"So did I." Orion turned to her. "Merry Christmas, Katherine."

"Merry Christmas, Orion." Katherine's butterflies went into a frenzy as Orion leant forward and she closed her eyes.

Orion could feel his own stomach going over as he gently brushed his lips over Katherine's before pulling away.

Just around the corner, Sirius walked back the way he'd came, a smile lighting up his face. He'd been taking his usual stroll around the conservatory when he'd heard voices. He hadn't quite made the corner on the far side, when he'd heard Orion's voice saying he wanted to stay there. On seeing who was sitting with his son, Sirius had hesitated long enough for the two children to wish each other Merry Christmas. Knowing how it was going to end, Sirius had wanted to give them some privacy and had turned back.

Walking into the breakfast room, he found Faith thickly spreading a croissant with butter. "Merry Christmas."

Faith wasn't big on Christmas, and suddenly felt uncomfortable. "Sirius, do you think you could take me home?"

Sirius felt disappointed that Faith wanted to go. "I can. Before we go, I'm having a party tomorrow night. Remus is coming and could pick you up, so would you like to come as well?"

"I don't know." Faith just wanted to get out, and wrapped her croissant in a linen napkin. "I'll get this back to you, okay?"

"Are we still on for dinner on New Year's Eve or do you want to just call it quits now?" Sirius wasn't going to mess around if Faith had cold feet.

“What time?” Faith hated admitted she was interested, but she was aware that Sirius wasn’t like anyone else she’d dated before and wouldn’t be running after her.

“I’ll collect you at seven.” Sirius hid his relief at Faith’s words. “Wear a skirt or dress as it’s pretty conservative where I’m taking you.”

Faith gaped. “A dress?”

“You know one of those things that don’t cover all your legs.” Sirius couldn’t resist quipping.

“I can’t wear pants?” Faith hated dressing up.

“No, Faith, you can’t.” Sirius held out his hand. “If you change your mind, tell Remus and he’ll get a message to me.”

“Okay.” Faith knew that she wouldn’t change her mind. “Shall we go?” She then gave Sirius her address and described her front room to him.

Sirius wrapped his arm around her waist and apparated them both out. A few minutes later he apparated back in just as Cassandra, who still wasn’t dressed, was coming down the stairs. She frowned. “Have you just been out, Dad?”

“I dropped Faith home.” Sirius watched Cassandra’s face tighten. “Come with me.”

Cassandra dutifully followed Sirius into his study. Usually she only entered his study if she needed him or if she was being disciplined. “I know what you’re going to say.”

“Tell me what I’m going to say.” Sirius leant back against his desk.

“That I’m not being fair about Faith, that I don’t know her and that I should give her a chance.” Cassandra listed everything that the girls had said to her the previous night.

"You're actually right for once." Sirius patted the side of the desk. "Come here."

Cassandra leant back against the desk, cuddling up to her Dad as he put his arm around her. "I know you've got to lead your own life, but I thought it would be with someone different."

"I admit Faith's not everyone's ideal person but I like her." Sirius kissed the top of Cassandra's head. "Cassie, I know you worry, but I'm old enough and ugly enough to take care of myself."

Cassandra laughed and poked her Dad in the ribs. "You know very well that you're not old or ugly."

"That might be so." Sirius was tickled by Cassandra's comment. "But what I'm trying to say is that I'll be alright."

"I know you will." Cassandra didn't want to move. She didn't get that much time alone with Sirius and right now she didn't want to spoil that time by talking about Faith.

"Did you enjoy your dance with H.J. last night?" Sirius had a feeling that Cassandra had a crush on him.

"I suppose." Cassandra was glad that Sirius couldn't see her face as it was burning as she thought about H.J.

"Do you like him?" Sirius asked bluntly.

Cassandra hesitated before telling the truth. "Yes. I've liked him since I first saw him."

"You're not happy that Faith was seeing him up until yesterday, are you?" Sirius started to put together a lot of Cassandra's resentment towards the girl.

"I just think it's awful she was sleeping with H.J., and then she spent last night here." Cassandra admitted.

Sirius let go of Cassandra and faced her. "I didn't sleep with Faith last night; she slept in Orion's old room. I don't know her well enough to know if I'll take that step yet." Sirius decided Cassandra was old enough to be treated like an equal.

"She really slept in there?" Cassandra found it difficult to believe.

"Yes, she did." Sirius could see that Cassandra was finding it hard to deal with talking about Faith. "Do you want to drop the subject?"

When Cassandra nodded, Sirius decided not to tell her that he'd invited Faith to the party the next night. "Let's go get some breakfast."

Orion and Katherine were both sitting eating breakfast when Sirius and Cassandra came in. Katherine beamed. "Merry Christmas, Uncle Sirius, Cassandra."

Everyone then exchanged greetings. Sirius couldn't resist teasing his son. "So Orion, how was the conservatory this morning? I thought I heard your voice when I was taking a walk."

Orion went deep red. "A bit warm, actually."

"It felt slightly chilly to me." Sirius put bacon onto his plate. "But then again I didn't manage to get all the way around it as I had to take Faith home."

Orion slumped slightly in relief. "Did she get home alright?"

"As I apparated her into her sitting room, I'd say so." Sirius knew that Orion thought he hadn't seen him. "After we've eaten, we'll do gift exchange. Where's Mione this morning?"

"She said she wasn't hungry." Cassandra rolled her eyes. "She's probably buried in a book. She's pretty excited about becoming Uncle Remus' full-time teaching assistant if she passes her exams."

"Actually, I'm here." Mione greeted everyone and sat down. "I'm just going to have a cup of tea."

"I think I'll join you." Remus walked into the breakfast room. "I hope you don't mind me coming so early but Rupert is spending the day with Anna, and Xander's been at H.J. and Harry's since yesterday morning so I'm all alone."

Cassandra frowned. "What was Xander doing at H.J.'s, Uncle Remus?"

"Looking after Camille while H.J. and Harry attended the Ball." Remus picked up a teacup and sat down.

Mione put down her own teacup with a rattle. "Will you all excuse me?" She then hurried out of the room.

Cassandra also got up. "I'll be back shortly."

Mione reached her room and burst into relieved tears. Cassandra knocked and slipped in. "I don't think it was Harry you heard last night, was it?"

Mione shook her head. "It must have been Xander in there." Mione wiped her eyes. "I'm sorry but I'm just so relieved."

Cassandra pulled Mione into her arms and hugged her. "See I told you."

"I feel so awful now for thinking that about Harry." Mione kissed Cassandra on the cheek. "Thanks."

"No problem." Cassandra passed Mione a tissue. "Blow your nose, wash your face and come back down when you're ready."

"I won't be long." Mione promised.

Cassandra made her way back downstairs. Sirius glanced up as she came back into the breakfast room. "Is everything alright?"

"It's fine Dad." Cassandra reassured Sirius.

Remus put down his teacup. "Do you think Mione would mind if I popped up to see her? I've got her exam results here. I meant to give them to her last night but I left them at home."

Cassandra perked up. "How did she do?"

Remus smiled affectionately. "Even I have no idea of how well she did but I think Mione should know first don't you?"

Cassandra pouted. "I suppose. She's in the Alabaster Room."

"I won't be long." Remus stood up and left.

Mione was about to return back downstairs when a rap on her door let her know someone was outside. Opening the door she went red when she found Remus standing there. "Remus."

"Can I come in?" Remus asked politely.

"Of course." Mione stepped back and let Remus in. "Before you say anything I want to apologize for my comment to Cassandra last night. I'm sure you overheard me."

Remus knew then that Harry had told Mione about him. "So Harry's told you about me?"

Mione nodded. "I'm the person who's been making your Wolfsbane."

"You?" Remus was surprised. "But I thought that Harry..."

"He's pretty good at potions but I learnt from an expert." Mione didn't explain further. "As I've just said, I really am sorry about my remark last night. It wasn't very professional of me."

"I took it as a compliment, Mione." Remus assured her. He hid his smile as Mione blushed. "Now for the reason I'm here." Remus held out an envelope. "I believe you've been waiting for these."

Mione nervously took the envelope and ripped it open, quickly scanning down the page. Suddenly her legs felt like jelly and she had to sit down.

Remus was worried at how pale Mione had gone. "Are you alright?"

Wordlessly Mione held out the sheet of parchment.

Next Chapter: Mione's results; we learn something about Remus' family history, and Hermione surprises H.J. when she tells him she knows all about Thomas Seville.

This should be posted either tomorrow or the next day as I've nearly finished it.

Chapter 11: Discovering Thomas Seville

Remus took the parchment and looked over it before his face broke into a large grin. "Congratulations."

"I was convinced I'd fail." Mione took the parchment back and looked over it again. "I can't believe it."

"You beat my scores and I came top of my year." Remus revealed. "Your potions score is exceptional; you now hold the highest score at Hogwarts ever."

Mione winced. "Then Snape is going to like me even less than he already does when he finds out."

"You might not need to worry about that." Remus sat down on the bed beside Mione. "I know you expected to become my full-time teaching assistant but I'd actually like to offer it to Harry."

Mione felt massively disappointed. "My Harry?"

"Well I didn't mean Harry Potter." Remus knew that James' son would never be up to the kind of standard Harry Sebastian appeared to be. "Yes, your Harry. Do you think he'll be interested?"

"Definitely but what about his current position?" Mione wondered if Remus was going to say she would be doing that in Harry's place.

"Minerva wants him to cover until the end of year to give her enough time to find a replacement. As good as he is at it, we both agree that the librarian's position isn't really for Harry, so if things work out with him, Minerva's going to offer him my position full-time when I leave in at the end of my contract." Remus could see that Mione was trying hard to be happy about Harry. "Which brings me to you."

Mione smiled brightly, trying to hide the tears that were threatening. "I understand why you've picked Harry."

"I don't think you do." Remus put her out of her misery. "I actually need a full-time assistant at the Council. Matthew's leaving in a few weeks' time. I'd therefore like to offer you the job."

Mione's mouth fell open. "Why offer it to me though? What about Louisa?" Mione didn't want to step on anyone's toes.

"You've already been doing some of the work, and you've coped very well. Louisa is a great secretary but she hasn't got the same natural instinct you have when it comes to research." Remus grinned. "And I don't think we'd be compatible sharing an office."

Mione ginned back. Even though she'd only visited the Watcher's Council's London offices twice, she was more than aware that Louisa was quite taken with her boss. "What you're trying to tell me is that you don't want someone fawning all over you, isn't?"

"You've got it in one." Remus admitted.

Mione was glad she'd apologized about the comment Remus had overheard. "And I'm quite safe as I'm dating Harry."

"Who isn't going to complain if you work long hours because he'll be at Hogwarts." Remus pointed out.

Mione felt a pang of regret as she realized that she'd be leaving Hogwarts and its secure environment. "It's a good job H.J. bought a house, as it means that I've got somewhere to live."

Remus shook his head. "You won't be living there. You'll be living with me in..."

"I beg your pardon." Mione interrupted Remus. "I'm going to be living where?"

"In the house that Rupert and I share." Remus realized he'd gotten ahead of himself. "I work very late hours and so will you. H.J.'s house isn't going to be practical. I know you can apparate back and forth but I prefer to have you and whatever you're working on on hand. It's one

of the reasons things didn't work out so well with Matthew. He wasn't always available when I needed him."

"But won't Rupert be upset about that?" Mione asked worriedly. She'd only met Rupert Giles once, and he seemed like quite a reserved and private person.

"He's already agreed to it." Remus had discussed it with Rupert first. "Xander is moving out in a few weeks' time when the residential apartments at the Academy will finally be finished, so his room will be free then. It also means I don't have to keep ferrying him back and forth from Hogwarts when he needs to come home."

Mione thought about it for a moment. "It does make sense but you'll have to deduct a fair rent from my wage. Otherwise I'm going to stay in H.J.'s house."

"You'll be paid in Muggle money." Remus reminded her, after he told her what her wage would be. "So let's call your rent one hundred pounds a month."

"That's awfully cheap isn't it?" Mione wasn't exactly au fait with Muggle money but even she knew that one hundred pounds wasn't exactly a great deal.

"We don't have a mortgage, and I feel bad taking that from you." Remus knew that Mione would have stayed in H.J.'s house as she'd threatened if he hadn't charged her something.

"Don't feel bad as you really should be charging more." Mione knew that she'd be a fool to turn down the offer. She decided that why they were on the subject she'd find out about Rupert and Remus' relationship, as she wondered whether they were a couple. "So why do you and Rupert live together?"

"Because the house belongs to both of us." Remus gave an amused smile, as he suspected he knew why Mione was asking. "When Dad died, he left it to us in equal shares."

Mione's face was a picture. "Rupert's your brother?"

"Half-brother." Remus informed her. "Mum's first husband died when Rupert was three."

"That's why he's got a different last name isn't it?" Mione deduced.

"Yes. He did take Dad's name but didn't want anyone to accuse him of favoritism when he started at the council as a junior watcher. He wanted to make it on his own so he used the name Giles. Now it's all he ever uses." Remus didn't mind as he and Rupert preferred to keep quiet the fact that they were related.

"So your Dad was magical?" Mione asked, trying to get a handle on the relationships.

"Yes, and so is Mum but Rupert's father was a Muggle." Remus didn't usually tell people but he trusted Mione to be discreet. "Rupert's actually a squib."

"I bet it was hard for him with you being magical." Mione knew she'd have hated it.

"Not until I went to Hogwarts. It was only then that we had the typical sibling fall-out." Remus smiled. "But Rupert's managed pretty well anyway."

"So is your mother still alive?" Mione was aware that Remus' father had been killed the explosion caused by the First.

"Yes, she's onto her third husband." Remus grimaced. "You've probably heard of her, Rachel Dompierre-St-Martin."

Mione's mouth fell open in surprise. "Your mother is married to the ministre de la Défense?"

"Only you would use the correct title." Working so closely with her over the last few months, Remus had gotten used to Mione's idiosyncrasies. "Yes, Mum's married to the head of the French Auror division. It's actually rumored he'll be the next French Minister for Magic."

Mione was curious as Remus had never mentioned his mother before that day. "Do you get along well with her?"

"Not really." Remus admitted. "She couldn't cope with my transformations. It was Dad who was always there for me. Rupert refused to go with her to France when she left so Dad brought him up as well. To be honest, I think Mum was happy about that."

Mione tried to recall what she'd read about Rachel. "She's got a daughter, hasn't she?"

"Yes, Nicole is eighteen and has just finished Beauxbatons." Remus saw little of his half-sister.

"Do you get along with her?" Mione was enjoying finding out about Remus' family.

"I barely know her." Remus admitted. "And I've only seen Mum three or four times in the last ten years."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Mione decided a subject change was in order, and got back onto the subject that had brought Remus up to her room. "Do you think I'll have any major difficulties with Louisa?" Mione could tell that the girl wasn't exactly keen on her.

"Not if she wants to keep her job, you won't." Remus wasn't going to stand for Louisa's antics as he'd done in the past.

Mione was still worried as there had been some tension between her and Louisa, as the girl viewed Mione as a usurper, even though at the time, Mione had only been acting as Remus' stand-in assistant. "I don't want to rock the boat."

"You won't be." Remus assured her. "I need to get together with you to discuss everything in more detail. Would you be free to go to dinner while you're staying here?"

Mione thought for a moment. "I had planned to be here until New Year's Day but I think I'll have to go home earlier now."

“Cassie will be upset if you do.” Remus knew that his goddaughter was quite taken with Mione. “I believe she’s planning something special for New Year’s Eve for you girls.”

Mione knew then that she wouldn’t be leaving early. “In that case any night except for tomorrow or New Year’s Eve.”

Remus thought for a moment. “I need to be at the Academy on the 28th to sign off on the residential section. Would you like to come with me and look round?”

Not having seen inside the building, Mione nodded. “I’d love to.”

“Pack an overnight bag then.” Remus warned. “I’ve got meetings on the 29th with some of the Watchers, who are also visiting the site, that I’d like you to sit in on so that you can get a feel for what you’re in store for. Matthew will be there, so he can start to run over some of the procedures we use.”

“That would be great.” Mione was excited and couldn’t wait to tell Cassandra and Katherine. “I’d best let you get back to breakfast then.”

“Aren’t you coming down?” Remus stood up.

“I’ll be down shortly.” Mione waited for Remus to leave and then she erected a privacy bubble before screaming her delight out loud. After taking a deep breath, she dropped the spell and headed out of her bedroom.

Downstairs Cassandra and Katherine were both anxiously waiting for Mione as she walked back into the breakfast room. Everyone else had finished breakfast and left. Cassandra looked anxiously at her friend. “Well?”

“I passed everything.” Mione was almost knocked over by her screaming friends. “Calm down.”

"Do you think you'll still be allowed to share our suite?" Cassandra didn't want Mione to move out. "Or will you get your own rooms?"

Mione's face fell a little as she realized how much she would miss her friends. "I'm not coming back with you to Hogwarts."

Cassandra's happy smile vanished. "Why ever not?"

"Remus has asked me to be his assistant at the Council." Mione was nearly knocked over again as both girls became excited once more.

Katherine shook her head. "You are so lucky."

"I know. I couldn't wait to tell you two." Mione grinned. "I'm sure Luna will be a bit more sedate about the news. Have you heard if she's coming tomorrow?"

"Not yet but I'm sure she'll let us know." Cassandra took Mione's arm. "So when do you start?"

"Actually I'm going away for a night on the 28th with Remus and his current assistant, Matthew, to discuss things so as yet I don't know." Mione felt her other arm being grabbed by Katherine as she was led towards the family room.

"You will be here for New Year, won't you?" Cassandra asked anxiously.

"As Harry's returning to Hogwarts then, I don't really have anything to go back to the house for." Mione would miss the house that H.J. had bought even though she'd only been there for a short time.

"I'm sorry you won't see much of Harry but I'm glad you're going to be here." Cassandra pushed open the doors to the family room, and looked up. "Can you see what I see?"

Mione looked up. "As long as Granger's not here, I can deal with it."

Cassandra and Katherine each kissed Mione's cheek. "Merry Christmas." The three girls then went to join the others in opening presents.

Boxing Day

Katherine could feel her pulse racing as she got ready for the party. Mione turned to her friend. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." Katherine belied her words by dropping the hairbrush she was trying to brush her hair with.

Mione picked it up and deftly began to help Katherine get her hair piled up on her head. "Are you going to tell me what's wrong?"

Katherine knew that Mione would find out shortly. "I'm nervous."

Mione turned her friend around to face her. "About what?"

Katherine blushed. "Everyone finding out who my date is."

"And?" Mione asked even though she thought she already knew.

"It's Orion." Katherine went even redder.

Mione's suspicions were confirmed. "You two got together at the night of the Yule Ball, didn't you?"

Katherine slipped on her dark crimson robes as she spoke. "Yes."

"I want details." Mione couldn't help but be a little excited for her friend.

Katherine stopped what she was doing. "We were talking about Cassandra's crush on H.J., and I mentioned to Orion about his own on Luna."

Mione gave Katherine a little nudge as she stopped. "Go on."

"He admitted that he hadn't thought about Luna all evening." Katherine could feel her stomach fluttering as she remembered what had happened next. "Then he leaned over and kissed me, and told me how much he was glad to have spent the evening with me. We met up in the conservatory yesterday morning and he asked me to accompany him tonight."

Mione hugged Katherine. "I'm so pleased for you both."

"I wouldn't get too excited, this is only our first real date." Katherine was terrified of it going wrong. "Do you think he'll like my dress?"

"I think he'll love it." Mione thought that the deep crimson color set off the red of Katherine's hair. "You look stunning."

Katherine felt relieved and pleased at Mione's comments. "You look really pretty too."

"But I'm not in your league." Mione knew she looked nice that evening but unlike Katherine, she wasn't absolutely dazzling.

"I just need to put in my earrings and I'm ready." Katherine then tried to do just that, only to fumble it.

Mione took the earrings from her. "Let me."

Once the earrings were in, the two girls made their way out of the room and were about to go to Cassandra's room when Luna came flying up the corridor. "I missed you."

Mione and Katherine hugged Luna in turn. Mione thought the blonde looked pretty in the ice-blue robes she was wearing. "You look really sweet in those robes. So who's escorting you tonight?"

"Uncle Grim." Luna had left him the minute she'd arrived though. "Mummy didn't want to come."

Katherine wasn't surprised. Luna's mother rarely attended functions. "I'm glad you're obviously feeling better."

"I am." Luna stopped outside of Cassandra's room and knocked, before putting her head around the door. "Are you ready?"

Cassandra's face lit up at the sight of Luna. "Luna, I was worried you weren't coming."

"I love your Dad's parties as much as I hate the Ministry functions." Luna kissed Cassandra on the cheek. "So are you coming downstairs?"

"I just need to put on some perfume and I'm done." Cassandra had decided to wear red as well that evening, but her robes were much brighter than Katherine's and clung to her figure. Cassandra turned and ran a critical eye over Mione's robes. "Those robes definitely suit you." Mione had brought robes of her own to wear but Cassandra had insisted on Mione wearing a clingy set of black robes that she'd only worn once and hated on herself but she'd just known that they'd suit Mione's figure.

Mione ran a hand down the front of the robes. "Thanks. We'd better go down. Katherine's date is probably waiting for her."

Katherine turned on Mione and squealed. "Mione!"

Mione just grinned. "She's going to find out in a minute anyway."

Cassandra gave a squeal of her own. "You've got a date?"

"Orion asked me to go with him." Katherine looked nervously at Luna, who merely smiled happily at her friend.

"I thought you'd got a proper date for a minute." Cassandra sounded dejected.

Katherine realized what Cassandra thought. "I do have a proper date."

Cassandra crossed her fingers. "You mean you and Orion are really dating?"

“Yes.” Katherine suddenly found herself wrapped up in an overexcited Cassandra as she confirmed the question.

“That’s wonderful.” Cassandra had hoped that her brother would forget about chasing Luna. She just hadn’t expected Katherine to be the girl who’d change his mind.

Katherine looked expectantly at Luna. “You don’t mind do you?”

Luna shook her head. “I’ve never liked Orion like that. I’m glad he’s found someone he really likes.”

Relieved that she hadn’t upset Luna, Katherine opened the door. “Shall we go downstairs?”

Cassandra took Katherine’s hand and began to practically drag her down the stairs. Luna and Mione followed behind not bothering to hide their smirks at Cassandra’s enthusiasm.

As Mione reached the bottom of the stairs, her face lit up. “Harry, you’re here already.”

Harry walked over and kissed Mione lightly on the lips. “I am.” He then turned to the other girls. “Good evening.”

“Hi Harry.” The three girls chorused before Cassandra glanced over his shoulder. “Is H.J. here?”

“He’s around somewhere.” Harry had been surprised when Xander, who’d been invited by Sirius, had asked H.J. to accompany him.

Mione was even more surprised that H.J. would leave Cammie. “Where’s Camille?”

“With a babysitter.” Harry watched Mione tense up but he didn’t know why and continued speaking. “Cammie was upset she couldn’t come but H.J. has promised her a day at the zoo to make up for it.”

Katherine, who despite Lily's objections, had grown quite close to Cammie, was pleased to hear that her cousin hadn't been neglected. "I'm sure she'll enjoy that."

"Good evening, Mr. Sebastian." Orion addressed Harry first as he came up behind the group. "Mione, Cass, Luna." He then held out a hand to Katherine. "Hi."

Katherine noticed that Orion barely even gave Luna more than a cursory glance. "Hi."

Harry suddenly realized what was going on, and after greeting Orion, turned to the three girls. "Shall we go find H.J.?"

Katherine was grateful to Harry as she took Orion's hand. "They know."

Orion groaned lightly. "I expect Cass went nuts, didn't she?"

"Just a little." Katherine admitted. "Do you want to get something to drink?"

Orion nodded as he led Katherine through the crowd before suddenly coming to a complete halt. "Are you as nervous as I am?"

At Orion's confession, Katherine felt all her tension drain away. "I was but I feel better now."

Orion smiled. "So do I. Come on."

Having gotten the most awkward part out of the way, the couple headed for where drinks had been set out on a table and several bartenders stood to provide anything that wasn't already set out. Orion picked up a glass of champagne and passed it to Katherine. "I can't have any, but you might as well have one glass."

"Thanks." Katherine winked at Orion who grinned back at her.

Orion grabbed a glass of juice, before bravely slipping his arm around Katherine's waist and heading towards the conservatory. A voice

stopped them in their tracks. "And where do you think you two are going?"

Katherine swung round, a smile on her face. "Dad, I didn't see you when we came in."

Orion, who'd immediately dropped his arm from around Katherine's waist, also turned around. "Uncle James."

James kissed Katherine and smiled at Orion. "Are you two here together?"

Katherine didn't get a chance to answer as Orion took her hand, and addressed James. "Yes, Sir. I asked Katherine if she'd accompany me."

James' grin grew even wider. "Well don't let me stop you."

As Orion led Katherine away, she groaned. "You do realize he's probably already arranging the marriage right now?"

Orion looked alarmed. "Do you really think so?"

Katherine laughed. "No, silly. But I wouldn't put it past him and Uncle Sirius."

Orion knew she was right. "Let's go sit down over the other side of the conservatory. Hopefully we won't be disturbed."

James happily watched the couple walk away before making his way over to where Sirius was talking to Remus and someone he'd never met before. "Sirius, Remus." James shook hands with them.

Sirius made the introductions. "Thomas, this is James Potter, deputy head of Hogwarts. James, this Thomas Seville. He's one of the investors in the Watchers' Academy."

James shook hand with Thomas. "Remus has mentioned your name a few times."

“And vice versa.” Thomas informed him. “It’s nice to finally put a face to the name.”

The four men then chatted about the Academy for a while until Remus spotted Cassandra and Mione heading their way and waved them over. “Thomas, this is Sirius’ daughter Cassandra, and my new assistant, Mione Dominic.”

Both girls shook hands with Thomas. Mione smiled politely at the man. “I’m pleased to meet you.”

“I understand that Remus has stolen you from Hogwarts.” Thomas had been filled in on Mione’s achievements by Remus. “Congratulations on your exam results. I hear that they were quite exceptional.”

“I wouldn’t go that far.” Mione blushed as she answered. “To be honest, the only thing I’m really good at is potions.”

Cassandra knew that Mione was being modest. “Don’t believe her. Now that Mione’s leaving, I might be able to have a chance at regaining my position as top of the year.” She blushed as she realized it sounded as if she was boasting. “Sorry, that didn’t quite come out as I meant it.”

Sirius put his arm around his daughter. “We know what you meant.”

The two girls stood and chatted with the group for a while, until Thomas turned his attention to Mione again. “You’ll have to tell me what you think about the new Watchers’ Council building and the Academy. Remus has said that you will be accompanying him up there later this week.”

“Oh, have you seen it?” Mione was interested to know what he thought.

Remus filled her in. “Thomas is one of the main investors.”

Mione felt her heart begin to race as she realized exactly who Thomas was, and she forced herself to smile. "I'm sorry, I didn't know."

"There was no reason you should have." Thomas brushed Mione's apology aside. "I've got an idea. Why don't the two of you join me as my guests for dinner on the 28th?"

Before Mione could decline, Remus responded for both of them. "We'd love to. I was planning to talk to Mione about the job that night but I'm sure we can defer it to the following night if Mione doesn't mind staying a little longer."

Mione numbly shook her head. "Of course not. If you'll all excuse me, I think I've neglected my date for long enough."

Cassandra hurriedly made her own excuses and followed Mione over to where Harry and Luna were dancing. "Come with us, now."

Harry led Luna off the dance floor. "What's wrong?"

"Let's go out into the conservatory." Cassandra didn't want to discuss what they'd just found out where anyone could overhear.

Once they reached a quiet spot, Cassandra erected a privacy bubble. "We've just been introduced to Thomas Seville. I didn't realize it was him until Remus mentioned he was one of the main investors."

Harry turned back to look into the room. "I can't see him."

Cassandra told Harry where to look. "Take a look over at where Uncle Remus is standing on the right-hand side of the room."

Harry stiffened. "How did he get an invitation?"

"He's probably come with Remus, or Dad already knows him." Cassandra was worried at the connotations of the latter half of her statement.

“Let’s hope it’s the first option.” Harry didn’t want Cassandra to feel the same kind of disappointment he had.

Mione slipped her hand into Harry’s. “I’ve got to have dinner with him.”

Harry could feel Mione shaking, and he pulled his hand free to put his arm around her shoulders instead. “Why?”

“He’s invited me and Remus.” Mione could barely get her words out for shaking. “I can’t sit down to dinner with Voldemort. He’s a killer, Harry and I don’t think I can do it.”

Cassandra glanced over at the group again before looking away. “If you hadn’t told me who he was, I’d never have guessed. He certainly doesn’t look like a killer.”

Luna gave her friend a smile. “And what is a killer supposed to look like?”

Cassandra shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know; all dark and menacing. He looks so normal.” Cassandra then went a little red. “I’ve got to be honest and admit he’s quite attractive and very charming.”

Harry was about to ask more about the dinner when he suddenly spotted someone else he knew, and he turned to Mione. “Will you be alright if I just go and speak to that girl over there?”

Mione hid her dismay. “Go ahead.”

The group of girls watched as Harry walked over to an attractive Asian girl. Cassandra frowned. “Who is that, and do you think she’s got something to do with what’s going on?”

H.J.’s voice interrupted the group. “She’s called Aditi Nessa.”

Cassandra realized that she’d let the privacy bubble fail. “How do you know her?”

H.J. filled her in. "She's part of the Watchers' Council. I met her when I was out with Faith one night."

Having been around Buffy for so long, Xander knew something was going on with the group that he knew nothing about. However, he also knew that it was probably none of his business so he simply smiled at Luna and Cassandra instead. "So is someone going to do the introductions?"

Mione had forgotten that Xander hadn't met the girls even though he'd heard about them. Cassandra saved her from having to answer. "I'm Cassandra Black and this is Luna Lovegood. I believe you must be Xander Harris."

"I am." Xander shook hands with both girls. "I can stop worshiping you both from a distance now and actually speak to you."

Luna laughed before looking thoughtfully at Xander. "Would you like to dance with me?"

"If it requires a lot of holding and not moving much, then yes." Xander took Luna's hand anyway and let her lead him off into the other room.

H.J. turned to the two girls. "So will someone tell me what's going on?"

While H.J. and Xander had been making their way over to the girls, Harry was making his way through the crowd until he reached his target. "Aditi, I didn't expect to see you here."

Aditi smiled. "Harry. My father was invited by Lord Black, as was I."

"Are you here alone?" Harry kept his tone casual.

"No, Thomas accompanied me." Aditi nodded towards the group where Thomas was standing. "You met him when I first showed you around."

"I remember." Harry politely held out his arm. "Can I escort you back to him?"

“Thank you.” Aditi took the proffered arm and let Harry lead her back to Thomas.

Remus smiled as he saw Harry approaching with Aditi. “Hi Harry. I don’t believe you’ve actually met our host have you? Harry, this is Sirius Black.”

Sirius held out his hand. “Please call me Sirius, Harry. You’re H.J.’s brother, aren’t you?”

“I am.” Harry nodded politely at James and then turned and shook hands with Thomas. “It’s nice to meet you again, Mr. Seville.”

“First names please.” Thomas informed him. “I see you found my lovely companion.”

“I did.” Harry responded. “Aditi’s the one who took pity on me the first time I viewed the Academy and she showed me around. They’re making good time with it, aren’t they?”

“Yes.” Thomas had been to see the building the day before. “Speaking of the Academy, I hear that you won’t be staying with the Council for much longer.”

Harry was stunned. “I...”

Remus interrupted. “Sorry Thomas, I should have mentioned that I haven’t actually spoken to Harry yet but I may as well do so now.”

Harry waited for Remus to fill him in. “I’m all ears.”

“Mione got her exam results back yesterday, and as you probably know, she’s passed with flying colors.” Remus presumed that Mione had told Harry. “Her work for me has been more than exemplary, and I’ve offered her the position as my assistant at the Council.”

Harry was confused. “But I thought you wanted her to be your assistant for Defense.”

Remus frowned. "Hasn't she told you?"

"I haven't really had a chance to talk to her properly so far tonight." Harry admitted.

Remus filled Harry in on what he'd asked Mione. "My assistant handed in his notice a few weeks ago, and I needed someone who was free to start almost immediately." Remus gave a slightly lopsided grin. "Matthew said I was a slave driver and he couldn't cope with the hours."

"But Mione has so little experience." Harry was aware that the others were paying rapt attention to the conversation.

"She's been more than capable of dealing with what I've given her so far." Remus had a feeling that Mione would be far more competent than Matthew had been once she got used to the work.

"So who will cover your classes when you can't?" Harry asked.

"I was going to ask if you'd consider it." Remus felt a little embarrassed asking Harry in front of an audience. "I've already spoken to both Minerva and James, and they've agreed that if you're willing, you can step in. It's going to be more hands on though than the stuff Mione was helping me with."

Harry couldn't believe what Remus was asking. "How do you know I'll be any good at it?"

Remus turned to Sirius. "Do you think I could borrow your study?"

"Go ahead." Sirius knew he should have offered straight away but he'd been interested in what Remus and Harry had to say.

Harry took his leave of everyone before following Remus into a very familiar study. "What about my position as librarian?"

"Sit down." Remus invited. "Minerva would like you to stay in it until the end of the year."

“And after that?” Harry was worried he wouldn’t have a job at the end of the year.

“I’m only going to be covering the sixth and seventh years next year. I’d like you to take the first to fifth years on a full-time basis.” Remus explained.

“What about Lily Snape?” Harry didn’t want to upset her.

“Filius is retiring so she’s going to be taking over the charms position. Her daughter, Felicia, will be old enough to attend Hogwarts next year, and Lily will have more free time. Charms is actually her forte, rather than defense.” Remus didn’t know that Harry had already suspected that that might be the case.

Harry returned to his previous query. “So getting back to my earlier question about how you know I’ll be suitable.”

“Your qualifications from Barstow were excellent, and I know from Miss Granger what you’ve been doing for her.” Remus had been astonished at Hermione’s improved work, and when he’d assigned detention to her, she’d explained when he’d pushed her.

“Someone needed to help her.” Harry defended himself.

“Harry, I’m glad that you are.” Remus reassured Harry. “I don’t have as much time as I’d like to help out.”

Harry relaxed. “She’s come so far in the space of two months.”

“I know.” Remus had seen her marks for all of her classes. “Which is how I know you’ll be a good teacher if you want the position. I could take my time and interview with Minerva but I believe this arrangement will benefit both of us. You’ll get some obviously needed stimulation and I’ll save myself a lot of time I really don’t have.”

Harry knew that he’d enjoy defense a lot more than he did working in the library. “If Mione agrees to take the position working for you, then you’ve got yourself a defense assistant.”

Remus once again pre-empted Mione in telling Harry. "She's already accepted."

Harry hid his disappointment that Mione hadn't been the one to tell him but held out his hand to Remus. "Well it looks as if I'm accepting then. So tell me a little bit about what I'll need to get up to speed on."

Thirty minutes later Remus found himself walking over to where James was standing in the doorway to the conservatory. "Where's Sirius?"

"Showing Thomas and Aditi around the wine cellar." James rolled his eyes. "I think it's Sirius' favorite part of the house."

Remus glanced out over the conservatory. "So what's so interesting out here?"

James grinned. "Orion and Katherine are making Sirius and I very happy parents."

"Orion's on a date with Katherine?" Remus was surprised. He knew how taken Orion had been with Luna.

"Yep." James knew it was a little early to get so excited but it was something he and Sirius had hoped would happen. "So tell me, did Harry accept?"

It was Remus' turn to grin. "He did."

As Remus was filling James in, Thomas was taking his leave of Sirius. "I'm sorry to leave so early but I'm afraid I have another engagement this evening."

"It was nice to meet you." Sirius shook hands with Thomas before brushing a light kiss over Aditi's knuckles. "Aditi, thanks for coming."

"I enjoyed it, Sirius." Aditi had met Sirius at the Ministry but this had been the first time she'd seen his home.

The two of them then left, and Sirius returned to his guests.

Harry's House

Hermione curled up on the sofa and yawned as she changed the channel ready to watch the documentary she wanted to see. Just as it was beginning, a crack sounded in the hallway and H.J. walked in. "Hi, did everything go alright with Cammie?"

"We had a really nice time." Hermione had had fun with the young girl. "She went to sleep about an hour ago."

"What are you watching?" H.J. asked as he sat down.

"A documentary on a philanthropist who's been doing some projects in Europe." Hermione looked worriedly at H.J. "Unless you want to watch something else."

H.J. just smiled. "Watch your program, Hermione. Do you want a cup of tea?"

Hermione smiled gratefully at H.J. and settled back down. "Please."

H.J. headed into the kitchen to make the tea. He'd just walked back into the room and glanced at the screen as he did so. "It's him."

"Sorry." Hermione got up and took her cup off H.J., who was staring transfixed at the screen.

"Thomas Seville." H.J. remembered then who he was talking to, and that Hermione had no idea of his interest in the man.

"He's the person the documentary's about; well at least it's about the Foundation he heads." Hermione thought H.J. looked a little stunned. "Are you alright?"

"Yes." H.J. forced himself to concentrate on Hermione. "Do you know anything about him?"

"Yes, which is why I wanted to see the program." Hermione couldn't shake the feeling that H.J. had received a shock.

H.J. picked up a tape. "Do you mind if we tape this and I talk to you about him instead?"

Hermione shook her head. "Feel free."

H.J. put the tape into the machine and turned off the TV. "What do you know about him?"

Hermione chatted happily about something she was quite knowledgeable about. "Well, he's absolutely loaded. His father is from Australia and they made their money mining opals and other minerals. The family has now got businesses all over the globe. I'm a little surprised you haven't heard of the Seville family before. Then again, as he's a Muggle I suppose I shouldn't be."

"He's not a Muggle, Hermione." H.J. watched shock flit across Hermione's face. "He was at Sirius' party this evening; that's why I was surprised to see him on the TV."

Hermione gaped. "You've met him?"

"No, but Harry has." H.J. put down his cup of tea. "So why are you so interested in him?" H.J. could resist teasing Hermione. "Is it the fact that he's good looking and rich?"

Hermione surprised him when she didn't blush and instead shook her head. "Not at all. I've always admired him. I did a school project on him when I was at junior school and I was hooked. I've tried to keep up with everything he's done since. Back then though of course I didn't know he was a wizard." Hermione shook her head. "I still can't believe that. His family is extremely well-known in the Muggle world."

H.J. was beginning to think that Thomas Seville wasn't Voldemort after all. "So if everyone thinks he's a Muggle, why do you think he's investing so much money into the Academy?"

"Thomas Seville heads up the Caritus Foundation which his family established years ago. That's what the program I wanted to watch was about." Hermione took a breath. "They actually give away

millions every year to good causes. Up until now I believed they were all Muggle causes. Obviously the Foundation must have thought the Academy fell into that category."

"Do you know much about him personally?" H.J. had never seen Hermione so animated before.

Hermione shook her head again. "Not really as Thomas Seville's notoriously closemouthed about his private life which is what is so interesting about him. He quite often appears in Muggle tabloids with rumors about who's he dating but I've read nothing about him in the Prophet and other wizarding publications. I shouldn't be surprised if he features more heavily in Australian wizarding newspapers than here as that's where he's from."

"So he's Australian." H.J. felt a little disappointed at what Hermione had told him.

"Actually his mother is English." Hermione recalled the pictures she'd seen of Rebecca Seville. "If she's a witch, it certainly explains why she still looks so good for her age. Most of the Muggle newspapers think that she's had major plastic surgery."

H.J. knew he was going to end up watching the program when it had finished taping. "What about Seville's father?"

"He looks good for his age as well." Hermione informed H.J. "I guess Thomas Seville must be a pureblood."

HJ was almost sure now that despite Harry's reaction to him, Thomas Seville couldn't be Voldemort, especially as he had a family who were so well-known in the Muggle world. H.J. decided to sit up and wait for Harry to get home. "I'm going to wait for Harry to get back so I can switch off the tape if you want to go to bed."

Hermione was tired so she wished H.J. a goodnight and left.

Harry apparated home about an hour later with a yawning Xander in tow. "I thought Luna was never going to let Xander leave."

H.J. grinned at Xander. "Got an admirer, have we?"

Xander smirked. "You know what a lady magnet I am." Xander's face suddenly fell. "She's not a demon isn't she?"

Harry and H.J. had both heard about Xander's fatal attraction to women of a demonic nature. Harry laughed. "Definitely not."

Xander yawned. "Good. Well, I'm off to bed. Night."

"Night." H.J. turned to Harry once Xander had left. "I think we've been wasting our time pursuing Thomas Seville."

Harry disagreed. "It hurt like hell again when I shook his hand today."

H.J. filled Harry in on what Hermione had told him. "I've got a feeling your reaction might be something like when I swore an oath. It didn't hurt at home but it hurts like a bitch here."

Harry mulled over what H.J. had said. "I'd still like to check more into him in the Muggle world before we can definitely rule him out." Harry scowled. "I should have known it was too much of a coincidence with him having a name like Thomas Seville."

H.J. looked ruefully at Harry. "You just thought the same as I did, that he'd used his and Seville's first names."

Harry got up. "At least Mione will be glad to know that she needn't worry too much about meeting with him and Remus for dinner."

"Dinner?" H.J. had missed that part of the conversation when he'd been at Sirius'.

Harry explained about that and his new position. "I'll drop by and tell Mione tomorrow when I go out and hunt down some Australian newspapers." Harry yawned. "Why the hell Lachesis couldn't have given us some sort of clue? We've wasted months thinking it's him."

"At least we know now that we're probably on the wrong track." H.J. switched off the lights. "I think it's time for bed."

As Harry and H.J. headed for bed, Thomas Seville was standing at the head of a table where numerous wizards and witches were seated. Most of them were wondering who the gold-masked man who had invited them was. “Ladies and gentleman, thank you for coming...”

Next Chapter: Mione starts her new job; Harry gets bad news; Remus is offered a venue for the Watchers’ Council bi-annual conference.

Chapter 12: Fate Intervening

December 26th 2002

After being dismissed, Aditi tiredly apparated home and headed for the bathroom. Using a reflective spell, she lifted her hair at the back of her neck so that she could view the mark that now lay nestled at the base of her nape. Smiling, she let her hair fall back down and spelled on the shower.

Earlier that night

After bidding Sirius goodnight, Thomas held out his arm for Aditi to take, and apparated them both to the house he was renting. "Would you care for anything before the meeting starts?"

Aditi shook her head. "No, thank you. So what do you think about asking Sirius?"

Thomas rubbed his chin. "I'm undecided. At the moment I'm leaning towards not asking him."

"That's a pity." Aditi liked Sirius. "His knowledge would have been invaluable."

"There's more than one way to skin a cat." Thomas informed her as he put his cloak down. "I'm going to have a glass of wine as there's still a little time before everyone begins to arrive. Are you sure I can't persuade you to join me?"

"No thank you." Aditi rarely drank alcohol. "I was surprised to find Harry's brother there tonight. I didn't know he even knew Sirius."

"Apparently he was there as Xander Harris' guest." Thomas had discovered that Sirius had extended an invitation to Xander as he was staying at Remus' home.

Aditi had seen Xander but hadn't realized that he'd been there with H.J. "I know Xander very well but I just assumed he'd attended with the blonde girl I saw him dancing with."

"Luna Lovegood." Thomas filled Aditi in on the girl's name.

Aditi was curious as this wasn't the first time that Thomas, who as far as she knew had had very little exposure to the British wizarding community, seemed to know the identities of people she didn't and she'd attended Hogwarts. "You're very well versed on who's who, aren't you?"

"Yes." Thomas didn't expand on his answer.

Frustrated that Thomas wasn't going to enlighten her, Aditi turned the conversation back to the matter at hand. "Are you going to invite Remus and Harry to join?"

"Remus most definitely as his position in the Council makes him an asset. But I don't know enough about Harry Sebastian yet to make a decision." Thomas sat down in front of the fire that was burning in the grate. "Harry's obviously intelligent and if Remus wants him to take the defense position, he's probably also skilled with a wand. There's also the bonus that he's going to become a permanent fixture at Hogwarts."

"Do you want me to sound him out?" Aditi stood close to the fire, rubbing her hands as the warmth of it drove away the chill from the trip down into Sirius' cellar.

"I think that would be a good idea but give it a few months until we see how well things work out for him in his new position." Thomas was aware that Harry would probably be more receptive to Aditi than himself. "I'm also thinking about asking Mione Dominic."

"I'm afraid I don't know her at all." Aditi hadn't been there when Mione had been introduced to Thomas.

"That's quite alright. I intend to make the necessary approach to her myself. She, Remus and I are having dinner together in a few days' time. I'll see how it goes from there." Thomas patted the sofa beside him. "Sit down."

Aditi gathered her robes around her and sat down on the leather, grimacing as it was still a little cold. "Do you need me to do anything before the others arrive?"

"Not right now." Thomas assured her. "Aditi, I just wanted you to know that your help has been invaluable to me, particularly in finding somewhere to hold this meeting."

Aditi suddenly felt nervous. "I'm glad I was able to help."

Thomas patted her hand that was resting in between them. "Don't look so worried."

Aditi let out a breath and gave a shaky laugh. "I don't know what's wrong with me."

"Are you nervous about tonight?" Thomas contemplated the girl as he took a mouthful of his wine.

"A little." Aditi admitted. "I'm not sure how I feel about being marked."

"I thought it might be that." Thomas had been surprised to discover that this world's Voldemort hadn't marked his followers. "It's just a tool so that I contact you if I need you."

Aditi looked over at the table. "Will I have to wear a mask?"

"I'd prefer it." Thomas picked up a silver mask that was lying on the table and passed it to Aditi.

"Will you?" Aditi took the mask and turned it over in her hand.

"Yes." Thomas picked up the gold colored mask that had been sitting next to the silver one. "Do you know that you're the only person who is attending tonight who knows who I really am?"

Aditi knew that while this was true, Thomas himself also didn't exactly know who was attending. "How did you actually get them to come?"

"Let's just say that a friend made the arrangements for me." Thomas wasn't ready to tell her the truth about himself just yet, nor how he'd managed to set up the meeting with people he didn't know.

"Why did you cancel the November meeting?" Aditi was glad he had; she still hadn't made her mind up at that point.

"It was a little inconvenient for some people." Thomas had preferred to delay and have everyone attend at once. "I almost cancelled this one but the invitees who originally couldn't make it agreed to return to the country early. I received a short note and the necessary token a few days ago."

Aditi checked the time. "Do you think we should make our way downstairs?"

"In a moment." Thomas pulled out his wand. "I wondered if you wished to receive your mark in private."

Aditi frowned. "Why would I want to do that?"

"Because it can be a little painful." Thomas admitted. "And I have a painkilling potion sitting out right there." Thomas nodded towards a glass flagon that Aditi hadn't noticed earlier.

Aditi thought about it for a moment. "Is it absolutely necessary to take this mark?"

"If you want to be a part of this, then yes." Thomas lifted his wand. "Or I can obliviate you and you can leave."

"Obliviation's illegal." Aditi pointed out.

"So is holding a meeting of this nature." Thomas countered. "The choice is yours."

Aditi thought about it before agreeing. "What do I need to do?"

"Kneel." Thomas ordered. "And bend your head."

Aditi was shaking as she lowered herself to her knees and dipped her head. She flinched as she felt the smooth wood of Thomas' wand touch her nape.

"Now before we do this, I need you to swear allegiance to me." Thomas wasn't surprised when Aditi's head shot back up. "I need to know I can trust you."

Aditi felt anger lance through her at Thomas' words. "As you've already told me what you're planning, I would have thought you already trusted me."

"I've had my trust betrayed too many times already." Thomas thought about some of his former followers.

"I'd never do that." Aditi was fervent in her denial.

Thomas put a hand on her cheek. "I believe you; I just need to be certain. I'll try and make this as painless as possible for you."

Aditi felt torn and she looked down at the ground. She truly wanted to rid her world of Muggleborns but she was afraid of the pain she knew she'd have to undergo.

Thomas could see she was uncertain, and tilted her head up to look at him. "Aditi, the mask I've given you to wear signifies that you, above all others, will stand at my side. My other, let's call them followers for want of a better word, will have to answer to you."

Aditi looked over at the mask that was lying where she'd left it on the sofa. "I'm ready."

Thomas hid his triumphant smile. This world's Aditi was far more independent than the young woman he'd known previously and she was definitely more power hungry. "We'll start with the oath."

Aditi withdrew her wand. "What do you want me to say?"

Thomas thought about it for a moment. "That you'll serve me to the best of your ability, that you'll never discuss my link to this

organization with anyone else unless I tell you you can, that you'll never bear arms against me unless invited to do so, and that you'll obey me unquestioningly."

Not having much choice, Aditi swore the oath and collapsed forwards. Thomas knew that it was best to keep going. "This won't take long." He then placed his wand at the back of her neck. "Morsmordre."

Aditi didn't try not to scream as pain far worse than anything she'd ever experienced before ripped through her.

Thomas put a hand on her head and stopped her from rising as he finished the spell. "It's over." Thomas poured out a glass of the potion and knelt down beside her. "Drink this, my dear."

Gratefully taking the glass with a shaky hand, Aditi swallowed the potion. She was a little dismayed to find that the pain didn't fully disperse. "Can I have some more of the potion?"

"It won't help." Thomas helped her to stand up. "The mark will be a little sore for a while."

"I'm glad I didn't take it downstairs." Aditi knew she wouldn't have wanted everyone seeing her scream like that. "It was a lot more painful than I expected it to be."

"Which is why I offered you the chance to take it now." Thomas picked up his own mask and offered his arm.

Still feeling a little shaky, Aditi picked up her own mask and let Thomas lead her out of the room. As they entered the room set aside for the meeting, Aditi was surprised to see almost thirty white masked people sitting around a large table; she hadn't expected quite that many attendees. Everyone stood as she and Thomas entered.

Aditi sat quietly as Thomas outlined his plans. As he finished speaking, one of the tallest in the room stood up. "How do we know we can trust you?"

"You don't." Thomas also got to his feet. "But you still came."

“That’s only because you were vouched for.” A woman had also stood and responded to Thomas’ statement. “We have no idea how strong you are, how committed you are, and whether you’re going to be able to do what you say you can.”

“I can prove the first point now. The rest you’ll just have to take my word on.” Thomas stepped away from the table. “I’m fairly certain that you all know each other, or at least most of you do. Pick your three best duelers. To prove my strength, I’m willing to take them on altogether right now.”

The woman laughed. “You can’t be serious.”

“I’m deadly serious, my dear.” Thomas was pissed that he had to prove himself like this but he knew he’d also enjoy the sport.

The group looked back and forth, and one by one, three men stepped away from the table. The smallest of the group addressed Thomas. “We can hardly do this in here.”

“You may be called to defend yourself anywhere; I think this is perfect.” Thomas threw up a shield blocking the table. “That way no-one’s going to get hurt, except for you three.”

One of the trio laughed. “You have no idea who you’re dealing with.”

“Likewise.” Thomas smirked behind his mask. “Choose your positions gentlemen. Anything is permissible except for irreversible deadly force. Agreed?”

All three nodded and then began to spread out, one man facing Thomas and the other two flanking him from either side. Thomas knew he was going to take out the man directly opposite him first, as he knew from experience that the group would expect him to initially attempt to attack one of the two men flanking him. Thomas turned to the woman who’d questioned his ability. “If you would like to count down from three, my dear.”

The woman did as he asked. As the countdown ended, Thomas didn't waste any time as he took aim at the man in front of him. "Expeto Excrucio Maximus." As Thomas had thought, the trio had expected him to take aim at one of those flanking him, and his spell hit the man firmly in the face. The man dropped screaming to the ground as the spell sought out the type of pain that would cause the most distress to the man. Ignoring his colleague's pain, the man to his left sent a reducto curse heading Thomas' way, which Thomas easily defended against. As he did so, he was aware of the second man circling around him, and Thomas pulled out his second wand before sending blasting curses at both men simultaneously. The two men were obviously surprised at the force of the attack as neither of them could do anything other than defend against it. Thomas didn't give the men a chance to mount an attack and continued to assault both of them with a sustained bombardment of their shields.

Thomas slowly backed up towards the man who was lying screaming on the floor. Out of the corner of his eye he'd noticed him trying to reach for his wand. As he got closer, Thomas kicked out with his foot, splitting the man's mask open with the heel of his boot and causing blood to explode over the mask, making it look pink in the candlelit room. The man stopped trying to reach for his wand.

The man who'd tried to circle around Thomas could feel his shield starting to buckle, and he knew that they'd all underestimated the man who was about to break through it. Thomas could see the wand shaking in the man's hand, and he knew that his second opponent was about to fall. A few moments later the man was sent hurtling into the wall, his head striking it as he slithered down it into a heap.

Thomas turned to face his final opponent. "You're doing quite well but I think it's time to bring this to an end."

The man shrugged, even as he held his shield. "Good luck with that."

Thomas laughed. "I like you, but you're still going to lose."

The man suddenly dropped his shield and ducked and rolled, sending a flame throwing curse at Thomas, who doused it with a water spell while at the same time sending the threefold spell that Lily Black had

invented at the man. Thomas didn't bother to continue defending himself and simply stood back as he watched the man easily disperse the pain spell and the blood boiling curse but collapsed as the third spell hit him and thousands of tiny cuts appeared on his body at the same time. The man cried out and dropped his wand.

Thomas walked slowly over to him as the man writhed in pain, biting down on his lip so as not to cry out, as the cuts grew deeper and deeper. "Do you yield?"

"Yes." The man could barely get his words out.

"Finite Incantatum." Thomas ended the spell and held out his hand. "A valiant effort."

The man took Thomas' hand and let him pull him to his feet. "Thank you."

Those watching were a little shocked that Thomas left the first man still screaming as he made his way over to the man who'd been knocked out as he hit the wall. "Enervate."

The man groaned but made no attempt to attack Thomas again. Thomas didn't even need to ask as the man gave in. "I yield."

Thomas left the man lying where he was and removed the spell from the final man. "I'm not even going to deign to ask if you yield."

The man couldn't speak as Thomas had broken his jaw, and the woman, who'd questioned Thomas' abilities, and another man, helped him into a chair. Thomas turned to the pair. "I suggest one of you heal him."

Thomas watched the woman cast a temporary healing spell on the man, and then sat down. "Now we've got that out of the way, I think that will be all for tonight unless of course anyone else wishes to challenge me." When no-one else responded, Thomas continued. "However, before you leave, I need for you all to swear an oath. If you choose not to, then you will be obliterated."

Thomas noted that, unlike Aditi, no-one pointed out that obliviation was illegal. The woman who'd spoken earlier stood up. "What do you need us to swear?"

Thomas outlined a similar oath that he'd asked Aditi to swear. He wasn't surprised when all there agreed to it. All of them wanted a Mudblood free world and none of them wished to be the one who said no if Thomas succeeded as he expected to. One by one they swore the oath, each collapsing as it ended. Thomas was satisfied. "There will also be one other matter. Unlike your previous master, I will be marking you."

"Marking?" The woman, who was obviously some sort of leader amongst the group, questioned Thomas again.

"I'm getting a little fed up with your questioning me." Thomas let a hint of steel temper his voice. "Yes, marking you. It allows me to contact you. It will also allow you to apparate to wherever our next meeting is." Thomas didn't tell them of the type of pain he could inflict via it. "I will warn you that it's a little painful though. However, there is a pain potion in front of you." At Thomas' words small vials appeared in front of each guest.

The woman refused to be cowed by Thomas, even after his demonstration and his implied caution. "Isn't this where our meetings will take place in future?"

"No." Thomas answered shortly. "I am in the process of acquiring a property but in the meantime you'll use the mark to apparate to wherever the meetings are to be held." Thomas went to turn away. "And my dear?"

"Yes?" The woman sounded almost belligerent.

"Crucio." Thomas held the curse for a few short but intense moments. He noticed that no-one moved to aid the woman. The woman, who'd collapsed screaming under the onslaught, gasped for breath as the spell ended. Thomas walked over to her. "I warned you about questioning me. That was just a small taste of what I can offer. Now do you have any more questions?"

The woman simply shook her head and remained seated on the ground. Thomas turned to the man next to her. "Help her up." He then faced the group. "If any of you have a problem with how I deal with insubordination and you wish to leave, you may do so now."

No-one left. Thomas smiled behind his mask, and changed the subject. "Who here is still at school?"

Five hesitant hands rose into the air. Thomas could tell from that action alone that they were most definitely of school age. "When you are at school you are exempt from meetings unless I tell you otherwise. I want no hint of what is going on leaking out, and your absences from school may raise questions that I don't want you to have to answer. Do you understand?"

The five nodded, and one of them hesitantly ventured a query. "I don't mean to question you, Sir, but how will we know the message is from you as we don't know your name?"

Thomas could hear both deference and fear in the young girl's voice. "The message will come from Dominus." He then addressed the group as a whole. "This is your last chance to leave without repercussions. Should you choose to stay you will remove your masks as I mark you."

The man who'd been the last to fall in the duel stood up. "I'll go first."

Thomas walked over to the man. "Take off your mask."

The man hesitated before removing his mask. Thomas nodded. "I thought it might be you."

The man frowned. "I don't understand."

"You don't need to." Thomas touched the mask with his wand. "This now cannot be removed by anyone except for you or me. It will also mask your voice, something you obviously took the precaution of doing tonight, as I believe so did everyone else." Thomas then made

the man kneel before placing his wand at the nape of the man's neck. "Morsmordre."

The man held out as long as he could before grunting loudly with pain and eventually collapsing to the ground just as Thomas ended the spell. "You will remain until everyone else has gone."

By the end of the night Thomas was exhausted but hid it well. He turned to Aditi. "You may return to the sitting room, my dear." Aditi inclined her head politely and left.

Before Thomas could say anything, the man spoke first. "May I speak freely?"

"You may." Thomas agreed.

"Lord Voldemort obviously trusts you which is why we all agreed to attend this meeting in the first place." The man sat down when Thomas indicated he should. "You tell us that you can achieve what we all want but we also believed Lord Voldemort would rid the wizarding world of Mudbloods and look at where he is now."

"I know where he is, and, as you've obviously guessed, I've spoken to him." Thomas sat down as well. "I could easily free him if I chose to do so but as I think he's a weak, ineffectual fool, I have no intention of doing so."

"You told him you would, didn't you?" The man wondered how Thomas had managed to get into Azkaban. Some prisoners had visitation rights but he knew that all such rights had been denied to his former master.

"No. I admit I thought about it but on reflection decided he wasn't worth my time. He's served his purpose." Thomas leant back in his chair.

"You won't hesitate to do whatever is necessary to get what you want, will you?" The man had a feeling that Thomas would be quite ruthless.

"I will not." Thomas informed him. "Unlike your former master, I won't hesitate to use the power I have. If someone makes a mistake, then they'll be punished for it. I don't care if it's a man, woman, boy or girl."

The man's former master had never punished a woman. "I noticed."

"She should have shut up when I warned her." Thomas held out his hand. "Give me your mask." He touched it with his wand before handing it back. "I will see you next time."

Thomas then disappeared and the man looked at the mask. Instead of being plain white it was now white with an embossed silver snake on it. He smiled as he knew he'd obviously earned his new master's favor. Sore and looking forward to a long soak, the man also apparated away.

Thomas appeared in the sitting room and picked up the goblet he'd set out ready for when he returned. It wasn't pepper-up potion but a mild restorative. "So how do you think it went?"

"I thought you'd gone too far when you used the Cruciatus on that woman." Aditi admitted.

"These people would have seen me as ineffective if I'd continued to let her speak to me like that after warning her." Thomas had actually moderated his response. "You cannot lead from a position of weakness."

Aditi knew Thomas had a point. "In that case, I have to be honest and say that it went better than I expected."

"They were either going to fall in line or they weren't." Thomas shrugged. "They're a little like sheep. Once one follows they all follow. They're all far too afraid of being left behind. Now I think I'm going to retire. I will see you at the next meeting if not before."

Aditi inclined her head and vanished. Thomas got up and apparated to his own room before lying tiredly on the bed and quickly falling asleep.

31st January 2003

Mione felt relaxed as she and Remus ate dinner with Thomas in the hotel suite he was staying in. This was the third time she and Remus had dined with Thomas during the month and Mione was now totally comfortable in his company. After talking in more depth with Thomas about the Muggle projects the Foundation was supporting, Mione had become completely convinced that they were indeed wrong about him being Voldemort.

Mione suddenly realized she was being spoken to. "I'm sorry, my mind wandered for a moment."

Thomas smiled indulgently. "It's quite alright. I was just asking whether you had managed to find somewhere to hold the Watchers' conference in March."

"Not yet." Mione was still searching. "All of the venues I looked at in England are totally unsuitable. I'm thinking about expanding my search further afield. Is there somewhere you can recommend?"

"Yes. I would like to offer my home." Thomas could see that both Remus and Mione were both surprised by his offer.

Remus politely refused. "We can't impose on you like that. Some of the meetings will probably run late into the night, to say nothing of the numbers."

"That won't be a problem. I own an island off the south of Florida where my main house is situated." Thomas explained. "I recently had a second property built on it leaving the older and much larger house vacant. If it can be of use to the Council, then you're free to use it."

Mione looked across at Remus who held out his hand. "It's your show, Mione."

"How many rooms and what facilities does the house have?" Mione hoped that it would be suitable; it would certainly save her a large chunk of time.

"There are thirty guestrooms but they don't all have private bathrooms I'm afraid." Thomas watched as Mione dived into her purse and pulled out a notepad and quill. "There are also two kitchens and several bedrooms for any catering staff you might care to bring along, and several rooms which can be adapted for any meetings you need to hold as well as a small library. Finally, there's a large room which was once used as a ballroom and a swimming pool outside."

Mione frowned. "We've got sixty-two attendees not including Remus and myself. Are any of the rooms big enough to put up three people?"

"Yes, but I'd like you and Remus to stay in my private residence as my personal guests." Thomas held up his hand to stop Remus protesting. "And I won't take no for an answer."

"You do realize the conference runs for two weeks, don't you?" Mione wanted to make sure that Thomas knew what he was letting himself in for.

"That's perfectly acceptable to me." Thomas got up. "Shall we move into the sitting area?"

Mione made a few notes as she walked, almost tripping over a coffee table. Thomas reached out to stop her from falling. "You might like to sit down before you carry on with that."

Mione sighed and shook her head. "I sometimes I get a little overenthusiastic."

"Which is why I hired you." Remus smiled at Mione before turning to Thomas. "She's only been working for me full-time for three weeks and I already don't know how I managed before her."

"I'm looking for a good assistant." Thomas smiled in a playful manner. "Why don't you ditch Remus and come and work for me instead? I can pay you three times what the Council pays you."

Mione laughed at the teasing offer. "Thank you but Remus is going easy on me at the moment. I know the minute he puts on the

pressure he'll see exactly what a big mistake he made, and you'd regret the offer when Remus tells you how terrible I truly am."

Thomas studied Mione for a moment. "Sometimes you conduct yourself in a manner that makes you seem so much older than you are. I have trouble remembering that you're only eighteen."

Remus saved Mione from answering. "Another stunning attribute of my new assistant. She deals with people in a manner far surpassing her actual age."

"Clever and capable as well as beautiful." Thomas took Mione's hand and brushed a kiss lightly over her knuckles. "Are you sure I can't persuade you to run away with me?"

"I'm afraid not." Mione smiled to herself as she wondered once again how they could have ever thought that Thomas was Voldemort. "I love my job."

"Alas." Thomas sighed. "Now can I get you two anything to drink?"

Mione and Remus told him what they wanted and the three of them turned to discussing the progress of the Academy.

15th February 2003

Harry pulled on his jacket. "I can't believe you two are going to be sitting in on a Saturday."

"Some of us don't have a girlfriend to visit." H.J. decided to tease Harry. "That is of course if she hasn't forgotten she's meeting you again."

Harry gave him the finger. "She apologized for that. See you."

As Harry left, Xander turned to H.J. "Harry's right. I'd have thought you'd have found someone to take out this evening."

"Not interested right now." H.J. admitted. "I did start talking to a girl when I went out with Harry on our last weekend off, only for her to

lose interest when I mentioned Cammie. I'm afraid that we now come as a package."

"You've really taken to being her father, haven't you?" Xander had been there when Cammie had first called H.J. 'Dad', and Xander had thought that H.J. was going to cry.

"Absolutely." H.J. smiled as he thought about the girl he now thought of as his daughter. "She's such a sweet kid. I don't know how anyone could have treated her so badly."

"I feel the same way about Hermione." Xander scowled. "When Harry told me about what her parents had done to her, I wanted to go round to her house and kick their asses."

"Harry wanted to do a lot worse, believe me." H.J. had had to talk him out of it. "Let's just say that Hermione's parents are lucky that they're still in one piece right now."

"I'd have cheered him on." Xander stood up. "Well, if you haven't got a date, do you want to go up to the Room and have a game of pool with me? I can't use it without one of you lot."

H.J. also rose. "I half expected you to take Luna out to Hogsmeade."

Xander shook his head. "I like her but she's a little scary to be honest. When she looks at you, you feel as if she's looking right into your head."

"I know that feeling." H.J. knew that this Luna had very similar qualities to his former wife. "Let's go."

In the girls' suite, Luna was keeping Cassandra company as Katherine had gone out with Orion to Hogsmeade. Cassandra pushed another chocolate into her mouth. "It's just not fair. Why can't I find anyone?"

Luna giggled. "I'm sure Harry would love to double-date you with his sister and Orion."

"Harry Potter?" Cassandra pretended to shove her fingers down her throat. "I'd rather be single for the rest of my life."

"I expect you'll meet someone when you begin your training." Luna consoled her friend.

Cassandra, who was feeling really down, merely snorted. "I'm going to go from a school where everyone distrusts me because of who my Dad is, to a place where no-one is going to date me because of who my Dad is. My new colleagues might not distrust me but I'm willing to bet that they'll all be too worried about upsetting Dad to date their boss' daughter."

"I hadn't thought of that." Luna sighed. "At least everyone doesn't think you're weird, and you haven't got to go through another year of this place without any real friends."

"McGonagall's already given you permission to stay in the suite on your own." Cassandra grinned. "Perhaps I can occasionally sneak in and see you."

Luna smiled dreamily. "Or maybe I can persuade Xander to visit me."

Cassandra thought about it, then shook her head. "Nah. He's too nice to do that, and won't he have finished work on the Academy by then?"

Luna grinned happily. "He's got an apartment in the residential section where they house the girls. He's going to remain even after the place is finished."

Cassandra's eyebrows shot up. "I mean I know its Xander and everything, but aren't the Council worried about the girls being housed with a man?"

"Xander said not." Luna had talked at length with him at Sirius' party. "He's actually really good with the younger girls. Apparently they treat him like an older brother."

"Which isn't how you see him, is it?" Cassandra teased.

"I think he's wonderful." Luna sighed. "But I've got a feeling that he doesn't think the same about me."

"He doesn't deserve you then." Cassandra staunchly defended her friend. "I think you're wonderful."

"I think you're wonderful too." Luna gave a hoot of laughter. "I think we're our own fan club."

"Someone's got to be." Cassandra picked up the box of chocolates. "Have another chocolate."

Early evening

Mione lay in bed looking up at the ceiling. "I hate this."

"Mione, we've just got to..." Harry was cut off.

Mione pulled the sheet around her and sat up. "Don't keep saying we've got to give it time. Harry, this is the fourth time we've tried, and it's just getting worse every time."

"Don't you love me anymore?" Harry knew how pathetic he sounded but he couldn't help it.

"Yes, Harry. I do love you, but I'm beginning to realize that I don't think it's enough." Mione wiped away the tears that were threatening to spill over and down her cheeks. "I can't keep doing this to myself or to you."

"Mione, I don't mind." Harry placed a tentative hand on her shoulder.

"I do, Harry." Mione took a deep breath. "Harry, I think we should spend some time apart."

Harry dropped his hand. "You can't be serious."

"I'm sorry but I am." Mione turned to face him, her eyes full of the unshed tears. "It's affecting my work, and it's affecting my sleep, but

worst of all it's affecting my ability to function. I'm in a new job which is taking all of my time to get on top of, and I just can't deal with this as well right now."

Harry scowled. "I go out of my way to come and see you because you complained I wasn't spending enough time with you, and even then you forgot you were supposed to be seeing me!"

"Which is why I think we should take a break." Mione felt terrible that she'd forgotten that Harry was coming over.

"Fine." Harry got out of bed and began pulling on his clothes. "Let me know when you can actually fit me in."

"Harry, please don't be like this." Mione didn't want him leaving on such a bad note.

"Mione, what do you expect?" Harry tugged on his sweater. "I love you and you've effectively just ended our relationship."

"I haven't ended anything." Mione swiped angrily at her tears. "I just need a break."

"As I said, let me know when you're free." Harry picked up his wand and vanished.

Mione began to cry, huge wracking sobs as she let her head fall onto her knees. Sitting downstairs, Remus had heard the end of the argument. Knowing he wouldn't be able to work if Mione was upstairs crying, he headed upstairs and knocked on the door.

Getting no answer except for Mione's sobs, Remus tentatively opened the door and looked round it. Glad that Mione was reasonably decent, he entered and sat down on the side of the bed. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Mione shook her head so Remus pulled her into his arms as she continued to cry. A short time later a resounding crack made both of them jump as Harry reappeared. "Just great. Couldn't get him in our

world so you thought you'd take a shot in this one? No wonder you wanted a fucking break."

Mione pulled free of Remus' grasp. "Harry..."

"Go to hell, Mione." Harry then vanished.

Remus got up. "Do you want me to go after him?"

Mione shook her head, and wiped her tears away. "Not with him in that mood. I've never seen two werewolves fight in human form and I'm not entirely sure I want to see the results."

Remus sat back down on the bed. "I have, and it isn't especially pretty this close to a full moon. I'll speak to him on Monday. Mione, what did Harry mean by his comment you couldn't get him in our world?"

Mione was glad that they'd already filled Remus in on their background otherwise Harry's comment would have meant a long night of explanation; something she knew she didn't feel up to. "I had a bit of a thing for Harry's Dad, who as you already know was our world's version of you. Harry felt a little insecure because of a minor crush I had and he's now just blown it out of all proportion."

Remus watched the tears start to fall again. He had a feeling Harry wouldn't be back, so he kicked off his shoes and climbed onto the bed next to Mione. "Come here."

Mione gave a laughing sob. "Do you think we should write comforting your assistant into my job description?"

"I'll look into it." Remus pulled Mione onto his chest. "I'm not doing anything tonight, so go ahead and cry all you want to."

Mione did exactly that.

Hogwarts

Harry slammed into the Room surprising both H.J. and Xander. "Get the fuck out now."

H.J. took one look at Harry's face and nodded towards Xander. "Let's go."

"But..." Xander could see that Harry was upset.

H.J. simply grabbed Xander's arm and steered him out of the room. "Believe me you don't want to be in there right now."

Xander followed H.J. back to H.J.'s rooms. "I've never seen him that angry before."

"Neither have I." H.J. admitted. "As unlikely as it is, I couldn't risk staying in there in case he suddenly changed, particularly this close to a full moon."

"I'd better leave." Xander knew that Harry probably wouldn't want him around when he came back.

H.J. nodded gratefully. "Thanks Xander. I'll see you during the week."

"Thanks for the game." Xander let himself out.

H.J. had a feeling it was going to be a long night. He was right. He had just dozed off on the sofa when the door to their room opened. "Christ, Harry."

"Just don't say anything." Harry was completely covered in blood.

"Sit down." H.J. ordered as he took out his wand so that he could start to heal Harry. "You were fighting in there, weren't you?"

Harry growled in the back of his throat. "I thought I said not to say anything."

"You've got the worst of your anger out." H.J. was now unfazed by Harry's residual anger. "She dumped you, didn't she?"

Harry dropped his head into his hands and started to cry. H.J. now felt a little uncomfortable but ignoring the blood, he pulled Harry into a hug and let him cry.

The Next Day

Mione opened her eyes to find a large and warm hand covering her breast and a body tucked around her. Heat flooded her face as she realized who was holding her. "Oh Merlin."

"Most people say good morning." Remus removed his hand and sat up. "Are you alright?"

Mione nodded. "I'm fine. I just need the bathroom."

Remus dutifully closed his eyes and Mione climbed out of bed and went into the bathroom. A few minutes later she came out wearing a robe. "Thanks for last night. I really needed a friend."

Remus sat up. "I'm glad I could help. I think I'd better go get showered." After getting out of bed, Remus pulled on his shoes.

Mione dropped the silencing spell they'd put on the room so that her crying wouldn't disturb Rupert, just as Remus opened the door to find someone standing there with their hand raised about to knock on it. "H.J."

H.J. looked from Mione to Remus. "And to think I defended you to Harry last night saying you'd never sleep with Remus."

"It's not like it appears." Mione started, only to trail off at the disgusted look on H.J.'s face. "H.J., please..."

"I just want Harry's wallet. He left it here." H.J. informed Mione and held out his hand.

Remus looked down at the bedside table and spotted a black leather wallet lying there. Picking it up, he handed it to H.J. "Is this it?"

"Yes." H.J. took it before addressing Remus. "I suggest you let Harry cover your classes this week." H.J. gave Mione a disgusted look. "And I suggest you keep away from Harry altogether right now. I don't want to see you either." With that H.J. vanished.

"But we didn't do anything." Mione burst into tears again.

"Once they've both calmed down, you can tell them that." Remus pulled Mione back into his arms. "I really must get this written into your job contract."

Mione gave a gurgling laugh even as she cried. "What am I going to do?"

"Give it some time." Remus kissed her on the top of her head. "Now go get showered. We're going to have a really lazy day and sit and watch all of my favorite movies and you're going to have a good cry."

"I'm fed up with crying." Mione pulled free of Remus' embrace and looked up at him. "You are far too kind to me."

Remus shook his head. "Nah. I have an ulterior motive. I want a functioning assistant tomorrow." He winked at her. "Now do as I said."

Mione gave her first genuine smile since Harry had apparated out the previous night. "I'll see you in your room then."

"Half an hour. I'll bring breakfast." Remus knew that Mione really needed a friend and he was also aware that the day would be good for him as well, as he hadn't allowed himself a day where he goofed off and did nothing for a very long time.

Hogwarts

H.J. opened the door to his and Harry's rooms and ground to a halt. "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Now that's not a nice way to speak to the woman who gave you a second chance at life." Atropos smiled lazily at H.J. "Nice look by the way."

Harry looked totally defeated. "I've just told her to leave."

"How can you appear here anyway?" H.J. closed the door.

"My sister kindly granted me a few hours as a mortal." Atropos waited for H.J. to turn back round to face her. "So I thought I'd use a little of that time to tell Harry that you've just found Mione coming out of her bedroom with Remus Lupin."

H.J. hadn't intended to tell Harry. "How do you know that?"

"H.J., how do you think?" Atropos grinned at H.J. "I was watching, so I waited until the drama had ended and came directly here. However, unlike you, I don't need to apparate to the edge of the wards which gave me plenty of time to fill Harry in before you got back."

"Apart from the fact that you're a nasty vindictive bitch, why are you wasting your precious time on us?" H.J. knew there was more to Atropos being there than she was leading him to believe.

"I promised Lachesis that I'd tell one of you that Mione's thread has been extended to her original life span, otherwise you'd have been viewing her body this morning and not the aftermath of her overnight activities." Atropos turned to Harry. "It wasn't very nice of her to use her new gift to sleep with someone else, now was it?"

Harry growled low in his throat. "As I've already said, get the hell out."

"I was ready to go anyway." Atropos gave a mischievous smile. "I've got other people to see and places to be."

H.J. watched her disappear. "This can't be good."

"Tell me something I don't know." Harry ran his hand through his hair. "I take it from your response that she was telling the truth."

"I'm sorry, Harry." H.J. handed over his wallet. "Remus won't be here this week so you'll be covering his classes."

Harry sneered. "Too afraid to face me?"

"No. I told him not to." H.J. sat down.

Harry frowned. "Do you think she was telling the truth about Mione's thread?"

"I don't know why but I think she was. Harry, no matter what Mione's done, she still needs to know." H.J. knew it would be grossly unfair not to inform Mione.

"I'll let you do that then because at the moment I don't want to see her ever again." Right now Harry was hurting too much. "I'm going to get some sleep. With the full moon tonight and covering classes tomorrow I'm going to be exhausted if I don't."

"I'll wake you before the sun goes down." H.J. promised. "I'm going over to Xander's place. He was worried about you."

"Thanks." Harry got wearily up. "I'll see you later then."

The Font Room

Lachesis was furious. "How dare she interfere like that?"

Clothos shook her head. "You knew it wouldn't be good when you granted her the wish she requested."

"I couldn't let Mione go." Lachesis sighed as the water in the font rippled and the images and sound vanished.

"Well it wouldn't be the first time someone's screwed everything up for the love of a woman." Clothos got up. "I'll see you later, Lachesis."

Lachesis frowned and walked down to the river. As she sat down she wondered if she'd made a huge mistake when she'd listened to Atropos a few weeks earlier.

Two weeks earlier

Lachesis found Atropos staring into the font that stood in the center of the garden. "What are you up to?"

"I was just watching Mione, as she's now calling herself." Atropos turned to face Lachesis. "It's quite amusing watching her and Voldemort flirting happily with each other, neither suspecting who the other is."

"She'll find out eventually." At least Lachesis hoped Mione would. "Anyway, she and Remus are just as friendly."

"Doesn't it bother you that none of them are concentrating on the job they were sent to do?" Atropos asked. "Harry is far too busy trying to get it together in bed with Mione while she's more concerned about her new job. H.J. was the only one who was trying to do anything and even then he stupidly listened to the Mudblood."

Lachesis frowned at Atropos' description of Hermione Granger. "What exactly is your point?"

"They're taking too long, Lachesis." Atropos was feeling frustrated. "If they don't do something soon, we're going to end up bowing to Voldemort."

"You don't know it's going to come to that." Lachesis argued.

Atropos snorted. "For the first time ever, we don't know how events are going to play out, and I, for one, am frightened."

Lachesis was shocked. "You're truly scared aren't you?"

"Of course; aren't you?" Atropos sat down on one of the stone benches that ran in a broken circle around the font. "Voldemort is out there and even though he's only made himself known to his new followers for just over a month, he's already gained their trust. When he finds what he's looking for we may as well just lie down and die. Harry and H.J. need to get their act together instead of lamely standing by while Mione entertains the enemy."

“They can hardly attack a man who, to the world they now inhabit, has done nothing wrong. And he’s also a man they now believe isn’t Voldemort.” Lachesis could see worry etching his sister’s forehead. “So we’re just going to have to wait it out. Give them time.”

“Mione’s almost out of time.” Even as she worried, Atropos couldn’t resist baiting Lachesis. “She was only granted the extra time in the first place because of Harry, and as I don’t see them staying together for very much longer, I don’t see any reason for her to remain. Harry and H.J. are just going to have to figure it out on their own.”

Lachesis felt a wave of sadness. “Will you allow me to extend her thread again?”

“What’s in it for me?” Atropos lifted an eyebrow and gave her sister a furtive look.

Lachesis knew then that Atropos had engineered the conversation towards a goal of her own choosing. However, she wasn’t going to bargain with Atropos without knowing what was on offer. “What do you want?”

Atropos pretended to think about it. As Lachesis had suspected, she’d deliberately manipulated the conversation to suit her. “For twenty-four hours as a mortal to be taken as I see fit, I’ll let you extend her thread for, say, ten years.”

“Absolutely not.” Lachesis shook her head. “You caused countless deaths the last time you walked in a world as a mortal.”

Atropos shrugged her shoulders. “I didn’t ask them to go to war.”

“No, but you’re the one who whispered in their ears about sedition.” Lachesis got up and started to walk away.

“So you’re just going to let poor Mione cross over?” Atropos called out. “Two weeks, Lachesis. That’s all she’s got left.”

Lachesis felt her heart contract, and she span back round to face her sister. “I’ll give you two hours for fifteen years.”

Atropos laughed. "That's hardly worth it to me. How about I allow you to extend her thread for the length of time she should have lived?" Atropos rose from her seat. "What is that worth to you?"

"You're taking advantage of my feelings for Mione." Lachesis hated that Atropos was so easily able to tempt her and so she reacted with anger. "But she's only a friend, so don't push it too far."

"Just a friend?" Atropos smirked. "Admit it. You were in love with her."

"Have I ever told you how much I hate you?" Lachesis faced her sister, her eyes blazing. "Mione was nothing to me other than a friend, something you seem to lack."

Atropos bowed her head in recognition of the barb striking home. "Whatever she is, what's my offer worth? I'm thinking somewhere in the region of twelve hours."

Lachesis fell silent as she thought about Atropos' offer. Even though she didn't trust Atropos, she knew she was going to accept. "I'll give you eight hours if you'll let me extend her thread to her original life span, and you inform either her or Harry what's happened when you're mortal. You will also not tell anyone what Mione and the others are doing there."

"Agreed." Atropos closed her eyes for a moment. "You can now extend her thread as you see fit."

Lachesis closed her own eyes and gave a small smile as she gave Mione the time that had been denied her. Opening her eyes again, she stared at her sister. "When do you want your time?"

"Give me the ring." Atropos demanded.

Lachesis slid her most treasured possession off her finger and handed it over. "Make sure you return it when the eight hours end."

"I haven't even decided when I'm going yet, and as I've already said, I'm not going to use my time up all at once." Atropos pocketed the

ring. “I just want this so that when I decide I’m ready, I don’t have to find you. When I’ve finished with my time, I’ll return it.” She winked at her sister and vanished.

Lachesis hoped that she’d done the right thing. Making her way over to the font, she looked into the pool and stared down at the girl who she’d considered closer to her than either of her own sisters.

Next Chapter: The Watchers’ Council’s Meeting; Thomas has a surprise guest.

Chapter 13: Temptation

22nd March 2003

Mione made her way through the restaurant to where Harry was sitting. "Hi."

Harry immediately got to his feet. "Mione. I wasn't sure if you were going to make it."

Mione let Harry seat her before answering him. "Harry, I only turned down your last invitation because I was busy, not because I'm avoiding you."

Harry poured out a glass of wine for Mione. "I still owe you a massive apology for my appalling behavior."

Mione covered Harry's hand where it lay on the table. "Harry, you've already said you were sorry."

"But I wanted to do it in person." Harry kept his hand where it was, not wanting to break the contact between them. "I should have known better but I was upset."

"I'd have jumped to the same conclusion, Harry." Mione squeezed his hand gently. "In fact I've got a confession to make." Mione then told him about how she'd acted at Christmas when she'd mistakenly assumed he'd kissed Hermione. "So I apologize for that."

Harry felt a little better. "I don't think it's quite as bad as I acted. Remus had to lock me into the classroom so that I'd listen to him."

"He didn't tell me." Mione removed her hand to take some bread from the basket that the waiter had brought over.

Harry wished the waiter to hell in his mind. "He swore that it had been entirely innocent and that nothing had happened when H.J. found you two coming out of your bedroom."

"I was upset and Remus sat up most of the night listening to me cry and talk non-stop about you." Mione felt red creeping up her neck as she thought about how she'd clung to Remus. "We both fell asleep just before dawn. I asked him not to leave as I didn't want to be on my own."

At Mione's admission of how upset she had been, Harry felt even guiltier at how he'd acted. "I really didn't help matters, did I?"

"Not really but as I've already said, I don't blame you or H.J. for jumping to the wrong conclusion." Mione stopped speaking to Harry as the waiter came to take their order.

After he'd gone, Mione took a sip of wine and changed the subject completely. "So, are you seeing anyone at the moment?"

"No." Harry felt his stomach plummet as he wondered if this was Mione's way of telling him she was. "You?"

"No." Mione put down her wine. "Even though I know now that I'm not going to pass over at any second, I'm still aware that I can't offer what any normal woman can." She sighed. "I'm never going to be able to have children which might prove to be a problem in a relationship. I'm not sure that too many men are going to be able to deal with the whole 'I'm dead' issue either."

"If someone loves you enough, then they will deal with it." Harry assured her. "I didn't care."

"I know, Harry." Mione felt comforted by Harry's words. "But you're different and you already know me."

Harry spotted the waiter coming their way. "It looks as though our food is here."

"Working with the Council, I've gotten so used to dining in Muggle restaurants, I sometimes forget how quick service is in a wizarding restaurant." Mione waited patiently for the waiter to serve them. "Harry, you said that you had something to ask."

Harry swallowed the chicken he'd just taken a small bite of. "I want to tell Hermione and Xander about us but I didn't want to do it without asking you first."

"You haven't told them yet?" Mione was stunned. "I thought you'd have told them, especially as Gra...Hermione is living with you."

"I'm glad you've stopped calling her Granger." Harry was pleased that Mione was making the effort. "But I said I wouldn't."

"I just assumed that after our argument you would." Mione bit into the salmon she'd ordered. "That's good."

Harry smiled as Mione put some more on her fork and offered it to Harry. "You're right. It is good but it's not as good as Cassie could make."

"It's odd isn't it, having Cassandra here but she's a totally different person altogether?" Mione didn't let Harry answer and returned to the subject of Hermione and Xander instead. "Harry, when are you going to tell them?"

"I thought Easter. I could use the Room but I'd rather do it at home." Harry looked pleadingly at Mione. "I know you're going to be back from the conference then so H.J. was wondering if you could watch Cammie while we tell them."

"I'd love to." Mione then turned the conversation to the young girl and Hogwarts. As the evening progressed the two of them slipped back into the comfortable companionship they'd once had.

They'd just reached a lull in the conversation when Harry yawned. "Sorry, I was up late marking."

"Are you coping alright with covering so much for Remus?" Mione put down her coffee cup.

"It's not difficult but he teaches differently than I would. I think it will get better when I take over the lower half of the school next year, although I have a sneaking suspicion that I'm going to end up dealing

with more than that.” Harry didn’t mind though as he was enjoying the challenge. “Minerva likes the assistant concept, and has said that all teachers can hire an assistant if they want to so I’m probably going to look at that if I find I can’t cope. She has, however, banned us from using pupils as she doesn’t want to set a precedent. Speaking of which, you’ve hardly said a word all night about your work. How is your job coming along?”

“We seem to get busier and busier as time goes by.” Mione grinned at Harry. “But I love it.”

“I’m glad you’re happy.” Harry had already paid the bill and stood up. “Do you want me to apparate you home?”

“I’ll be fine.” Mione sighed. “Remus will probably be waiting up with work for me.”

“At the weekend?” Harry was appalled.

“We’re burning the candles at both ends to get everything ready for next week.” It had gone midnight every night that week before Mione had been getting to bed.

“I’m sorry if I took you away from your work.” Harry apologized.

“Don’t be; I needed a break.” Mione kissed Harry on the cheek. “I’m glad we got together like this. It’s nice to know that we’re still friends.”

“We’ll always be friends.” Harry kissed Mione on the forehead. “I’ll be in touch after you get back.”

“Let me know when you want me to watch Cammie. To be honest though, the first week of the holidays would be better for me, as Remus has said I can probably take the second week off to recover from the conference.” Mione stepped back. “I’m sorry, but I really have to go. Goodnight, Harry.”

“Goodnight.” Harry watched her disappear before apparating away and heading for Hogwarts.

H.J. looked over as Harry walked into their rooms. "So, how did it go?"

"Bloody awful." Harry poured out two scotches before passing one to H.J.

H.J. hadn't expected such a negative response from Harry. "I thought she'd forgiven us."

Harry pulled off his tie and slumped into his favorite chair. "She has."

"So what's the problem then?" H.J. leant forward.

"I'm still in love with her." Harry took a mouthful of scotch. "But I don't think she feels the same way about me anymore."

"Is she seeing someone else?" H.J. had hoped that Harry would have gotten over her by now.

"No but that's only because she's worried about not being able to have children and how to tell them that's she dead." Harry groaned. "Why can't fate just cut me a break?"

"Because we know that she's a bitch, Harry." H.J. reminded him. "So what are you going to do about Mione?"

"Right now?" Harry finished off his scotch and got up to get another. "Nothing, because I don't want to screw things up. We actually had a really good time this evening so I'm hoping that she might change her mind about how she feels."

H.J. could see a disaster in the making. "Harry, don't get your hopes up."

"I can't help it, H.J." Harry sat back down. "I've loved her for most of my life and I don't see that changing."

H.J. leant forward and put his hand on Harry's knee. "Harry, I understand how that feels but you can't live your life hoping she'll change her mind."

"You really do care about me, don't you?" Harry looked H.J. in the eye.

H.J. nodded. "I know we're not really brothers but that's how it feels."

"I may as well be honest with you. I feel the same way." Harry patted H.J.'s hand. "Now I'm going to go to bed to mope."

H.J. grinned. If Harry was able to joke about it then he hoped that things wouldn't get as bad as they had. "Goodnight, Harry."

"Goodnight." Harry headed into his bedroom and shut the door.

29th March 2003

During dinner Thomas chatted amiably with Remus and Mione until Remus excused himself. "I'm afraid I have a meeting with several of the Watchers." He held out his hand to Thomas. "It was very kind of you to invite us to dinner like this. You've done more than enough by having us here to stay."

"Remus, it was my pleasure." Thomas stood up and shook hands with Remus.

Mione also stood up. "Do you want me to come with you and take notes?"

"Not this time, Mione." Remus kissed her on the cheek. "It's more of a question and answer session."

Mione sat back down. "I'll see you tomorrow then."

As Remus left, Thomas poured out some more wine for both he and Mione. "I know you must have some questions about this place, so go ahead and ask."

"I expect the wards surrounding this place stop anyone who isn't invited from straying, don't they?" Remus and Mione had had to be

keyed into the wards before they were admitted to Thomas' private residence.

"Exactly, so my privacy is maintained at all times. And I don't get bothered by Muggles as the island is surrounded by Muggle repelling wards." Thomas could see that Mione was surprised.

"That must have been expensive." She blushed as she remembered who she was talking to. "Then again, money isn't a problem for you, is it?"

Thomas smiled. "No, it's not." He then changed the subject. "I hope your rooms are comfortable."

Mione's face lit up. "They're beautiful but I could have slept with the Council members in the other house."

Thomas shook his head. "I told you when I offered the house that I wouldn't allow that. It would have been very rude of me to let Remus in his position as Head of the Council share a bedroom, and I know he likes having you close by."

Mione gave a slightly mischievous smile. "I have to admit I like not having to share a bathroom."

"So you see, it works out well for both you and Remus doesn't it?" Thomas stood up. "I have an idea. I would like to show you this house but I do have work of my own to attend to. Would you like to see a room each day of your stay?"

"You don't have to pander to me." Mione didn't want to bother Thomas; he'd already been more than kind. "I have plenty of things I can be doing."

"It's no bother." Thomas held out his arm for Mione to take. "I think I'll show you the library today. I've already keyed you into the wards meaning that you can take any book out of it you want to."

"You have separate wards on the library?" Mione followed Thomas into the corridor and they turned left to head towards the library.

“It’s merely a precaution. There are some very expensive and very dangerous books in there.” Thomas explained.

Mione glanced at the walls as they walked. “This was really only built three years ago?”

“Yes; it looks much older than that though. It was one of the things I demanded from the architect. I don’t like newer buildings very much.” Thomas stopped and opened a solid, oak door. “Go in.”

Mione stepped into the three storey room and gave a small sigh. “I feel as if I’ve just died and gone to heaven.”

Thomas laughed at Mione’s obvious delight. “Feel free to wander round and pick something to take back to your room if you so wish. I’ll wait here for you.”

Mione was aware that Thomas had said he had things to do, so she didn’t linger too long, quickly finding a history book she liked the look of before rejoining him at the entrance. “I’ve found something, thank you.”

Thomas held out his arm once more. “Let me escort you back to your room.”

As they walked, Mione realized that the house was laid out in an H shape with a glass covered corridor joining the two halves. “Are your sleeping quarters all on one side?”

Thomas shook his head. “No. My suite is on the same side as the dining room, library and potions lab. On the side you’re in are the kitchens, guest bedrooms and a slightly larger dining room. There are, of course, other rooms but you’ll have to wait to see them.”

They soon reached Mione’s door, and she was endeared by Thomas’ manners as he took her hand and lightly brushed a kiss over her knuckles. “I hope you sleep well. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.” Mione entered the large, airy room she’d been given. A bed with a coffee colored canopy over it dominated the bedroom, but the sitting area was a little larger and had several creamy colored sofas and solid oak tables littered throughout it. She’d noticed that wood played a large part in the house’s design.

After showering, she slipped into her cotton pajamas and was about to get into bed to make a start on the book, when she noticed a long rectangular box sitting on her pillow with a note attached to it. She opened it up.

‘I hope this might be of use to you when reading the book. T.S.’

Mione took out the beautifully decorated leather bookmark and slid it into the start of the book. After an hour’s reading, she ran her fingertips down the bookmark before using it to mark the page she’d reached. Placing the book on the bedside table, she doused the lights and slipped beneath the covers.

The next evening she’d had to forgo seeing another room as she and Remus were in meetings until almost midnight and on her return, she’d ended up going straight to bed. The evening afterwards she, Remus and Thomas all dined together again. Remus, however, ended up excusing himself as he wanted an early night, as in contrast to the previous night, all the meetings had wound down early. Thomas stood at the end of the meal. “I’m sorry you couldn’t make it yesterday.”

“So am I but I’m afraid everything ran late.” Mione took Thomas’ arm. “So what are you going to show me tonight?”

Thomas liked that Mione wasn’t afraid to ask. “The potions lab. If I remember correctly, Remus said that your potions’ NEWT was the highest recorded score ever at Hogwarts, even surpassing the Potions’ Master’s score.”

Mione blushed. “It was but potion making has been a major interest of mine since I was very young.”

“So what potions have you brewed?” Thomas was very interested in Mione’s capabilities, and stopped walking for a moment while they discussed the various potions she’d brewed, including some of the more obscure ones.

“You were able to brew the Draught of Living Death at nine years old?” Thomas was a little surprised. In his experience it was beyond most sixth years to get it exactly right and they were supposed to be able to brew it.

“I had a voracious appetite for making potions and needed harder and harder ones to try and keep me interested. Obviously I couldn’t brew everything as some were rather dangerous for a child to be attempting.” Mione admitted as they began walking again.

“This way.” Thomas opened a door leading to a spiral staircase.

As the staircase came to an end, Mione gasped. “This is amazing.” Potion ingredients covered the wall in front of her. Unlike many potions labs, this one was well lit and had numerous brewing stations. Cauldrons of every shape and size adorned the wall opposite the ingredients. She broke away from Thomas to peruse the ingredients. “You’ve got Calipher’s Delight. I thought it was extinct.”

“It’s surprising what turns up if you have enough money to bargain with.” Thomas waited patiently as Mione continued her exploration.

At the end of the shelving, she turned back to face Thomas. “Any potions master would be delighted if they had somewhere like this to use. It’s a wonderful room.”

“Thank you.” Thomas inclined his head slightly. “Before I walk you back to your room, I have a proposition for you.”

Mione found her curiosity was piqued. “What is it?”

“I’m in need of a good potions expert. I’d like to offer you the position.” Thomas could see Mione hadn’t been expecting such an offer.

Mione was stunned. "I'm flattered but I'm afraid I can't accept. I'm no potions mistress, and while I enjoy potion making, it's not an all encompassing passion of mine."

"I understand." Thomas held out his arm again. "I'll take you back to your room now."

Mione was worried she'd affronted him. "I hope my refusal hasn't offended you."

"Not at all." Thomas assured her. "I doubted you'd take up the offer as I can see you clearly enjoy working with Remus. It was just a thought."

Mione relaxed. "I do enjoy working with Remus. It's a perfect position for me."

"Well, this is your room." Thomas, as he had on the first night, brushed a kiss across Mione's knuckles before leaving her alone.

Once in her room, Mione showered and changed. When she returned to the bedroom she found a crystal vase filled with yellow and white roses sitting on one of the small side tables. A note, in the same type of envelope as the one that had accompanied the bookmark, was propped against the vase. Mione tore it open.

'You may not have an all encompassing passion for potions, but I hope you do for roses. T.S.'

Mione picked out a yellow rose to smell it and smiled to herself before replacing it and taking some work out of her trunk.

April 11th 2003

Remus had had to schedule one final evening meeting during dinner on the last night of the conference. He hadn't wanted to offend Thomas by not attending the meal he'd asked Remus and Mione to join him at, so Remus asked Mione if she wouldn't mind missing the meeting and having dinner alone with Thomas instead.

Mione hadn't minded and had passed on Remus' apologies, which Thomas brushed off as he had with Remus' own personal apology. At the end of the meal instead of taking her into the hallway, Thomas headed towards the bank of windows that lined the opposite wall. "Would you like to join me on the verandah?"

"It's a nice night, so yes." Mione followed Thomas through the double doors that led to the verandah than encircled the entire house. She was surprised when he didn't stop at the table they had sat at during breakfast every day.

Thomas noted her surprise. "My own private verandah is around the corner. Obviously you won't be able to see the ocean but there will be a nice breeze on that side."

Once they reached the candlelit verandah, Mione sat down on the padded chair and smiled as Thomas opened a bottle of champagne that was sitting in an ice-bucket. "How did you know I'd say yes?"

"Because you're too polite to refuse." Thomas handed over a champagne flute.

Mione took it and smiled. "You're right of course." She looked out into the darkness. "It's a pity there's no moonlight. I imagine the view is spectacular from up here."

"It is." Thomas sat down opposite her. "It's the main reason my bedroom overlooks this part of the property. I can see the ocean when I wake in the morning."

"You're very lucky." Mione gave a rueful smile. "My view in the morning is of water, but only if I open my bathroom door."

Thomas laughed. "Perhaps you should persuade Remus to move his house."

Mione laughed as well. "I don't think that's going to happen anytime soon, so I'll have to put up with the view I've got."

"You and Remus seem to get along very well. Are you two... dating?" Thomas didn't think they were but he wasn't sure.

"No, we're not." Mione wasn't surprised by the question, as it wasn't the first time someone had intimated that they were. "We have an excellent working relationship and, as I live in his house, we're also good friends."

"I'm sorry if I was presumptuous but you both seem to have an easy way with other that usually only comes from when people are lovers." Thomas apologized.

"You wouldn't be the first person who'd got that impression." Mione suddenly yawned. "I'm sorry; that took me by surprise."

Thomas held out his hand. "It's getting late. Instead out of sitting out here, would you like to see one more room before you leave?"

Interested to see something new, Mione got up and took Thomas' hand and let him lead her around the corner of the verandah and to some stairs that led up to the roof of the house. As they reached the top of the stairs, Mione found she was on a walkway which overlooked a brightly lit conservatory which was full of flowers. "That's remarkable."

"The roof actually retracts so that I can make the most of the weather." Thomas walked around the gantry leaving Mione to follow.

"I take it that gardeners attend to this?" Mione couldn't believe that Thomas did it himself.

"They do. Obviously I can't employ Muggles so most of my servants who aren't house-elves, and in this case gardeners, are squibs." Thomas reached a second staircase.

Mione stopped to look down into the conservatory once more before she descended the staircase. "Did one of your gardeners pick the roses I found in my room from here?"

"The roses did come from here." Thomas waited at the foot of the staircase for Mione to join him. "However, my gardener didn't pick them, I did."

Mione was a little astounded. "You certainly treat your guests well. Bookmarks, roses and chocolates." She deliberately didn't mention the more expensive gifts she'd found in her room.

"I have a slight confession to make." Thomas opened a door which led into the corridor where Mione's room lay. "I don't treat all of my guests like that. I'm not sure Remus would have been quite as delighted as you were with the roses."

Even as she blushed, Mione laughed. "But he would have enjoyed the chocolates."

"So you liked them?" Thomas stopped outside of Mione's door.

"They were exquisite." Mione had treated herself to one a night, wanting to make them last. "Do you have a chocolate factory hidden here as well?"

Thomas laughed at Mione's joking question. "No, they were from Paris. I had them flown in."

"Flown?" Mione was shocked at Thomas' comment.

"They're Muggle chocolates, Mione." Thomas sighed. "There are some things wizards don't do well, and chocolate is one of them."

Mione was reeling. "I thought this island was off the south of the Florida."

"It is." Thomas confirmed Mione's supposition. "And before you ask, no, I don't usually have chocolates flown all this way."

Mione couldn't believe that he'd had them flown in just for her. "I don't know what to say."

“You’ve already said thank you.” Thomas kissed the back of her hand as he’d done every night that he’d escorted her back to her room. “I’m pleased you enjoyed them. It’s been a pleasure to have someone as intellectually stimulating as yourself to stay. It’s just my way of saying thank you.”

Mione felt faintly disappointed at Thomas’ words. “It’s been just as much of a pleasure for me.”

Thomas inclined his head. “I’m glad.” With that he walked away.

Mione entered her room and found a single black rose sitting on the table by the entrance. There was no note attached to it but she knew immediately that it was from Thomas. Smiling to herself, she put it down and headed into the bathroom to shower. After re-entering her bedroom, and deciding that she’d read for a little while, she slipped into her nightgown and matching robe.

As she walked by the bed, she spotted an envelope on the pillow. Looking round she couldn’t see that it accompanied anything. Sliding her finger under the seal, she ripped it open and pulled out the note it contained.

‘There’s just one room you haven’t see yet. If you would care to see it, take the rose and say ‘Yes’. T.S.’

Next Chapter: Sorry - Thomas' visitor is next chapter and not this one. Harry receives an offer he can't refuse; Cammie gets bad news.

Chapter 14: Betrayal

April 11th 2003

Mione felt her stomach go over as she re-read the note to make sure she'd understood it correctly.

Walking into the sitting room and over to the side table, Mione picked up the rose that was lying on it, turning it over in her hand. She'd known that Thomas was interested in her. Every night she'd returned to her room after spending time with him, she'd found something waiting for her. At first she'd told herself he was just being kind but as the gifts had become more and more extravagant she knew that it was more than that.

Mione took a deep breath, and tried to analyze how she felt. She knew she was attracted to him; it was hard not to be. He was not only good-looking, but also intelligent and well-versed in current matters. His old world charm of treating her with courtesy every night had also delighted her. And the fact that he wasn't Voldemort as they'd originally thought was a huge bonus. A little voice inside her head told her that she'd still have found him attractive even if he had been. Quashing the voice, Mione put the rose down and picked up her briefcase instead, pulling out some work that she knew she needed to get done.

After waiting for half an hour, Thomas poured himself a glass of champagne and went to look over some papers he had waiting for him on his desk. A tiny crack made him spin round. "Who are you and how did you get in here?"

The woman who'd appeared ignored Thomas' drawn wand, and merely smiled before helping herself to a glass of champagne. "Don't be so jumpy, Thomas." She sat down and crossed her legs before leaning back into the chair. "I want to talk to you about a deal that might work to our mutual benefit."

Thomas didn't lower his wand. "Who are you and why should I listen to you?"

"I'm called Atropos." Atropos took a mouthful of the champagne. "Nice champagne by the way. And you should be listening to me because I know who you really are, Lord Voldemort."

Thomas kept his cool. "I beg your pardon?"

"Don't bother trying to deny it, Thomas." Atropos got up and proceeded to tell Thomas a little more about his former self. "Before you ask how I know all that, I'll tell you. I know because I'm not of this world nor am I from yours. I'm a Sister of Fate which means I'm immortal."

"Immortal?" Thomas was a little confused as to why she was telling him at all. "But you're not a ghost, are you?"

"No, I'm not." Atropos held out her hand to him. "I'm flesh and blood just like you."

Thomas took her hand feeling the warmth of it before releasing it. "So why are you here?"

"I'm here because I have some information that might be invaluable to you in gaining what I know you crave." Atropos acted as if she had the upper hand. "I know you want to be immortal just like me."

Deciding she was unlikely to attack him as she hadn't already done so, Thomas reholstered his wand. "So why would an immortal offer to help me?"

"I'll be honest with you. Thomas, you're destined to succeed in gaining what you want." Atropos watched as a triumphant smile graced Thomas' face. "But you'll need my help to get there."

"You've just said I'm destined to succeed." Thomas knew there was more to Atropos' offer than simple kindness. "So why do I need your help, and what's in it for you?"

"Obviously I know something you don't." Atropos said smugly as she sat back down.

Thomas laughed derisively. "And that's supposed to interest me? Lots of people know things I don't."

"But I'm one of the few who knows who can stop you from fulfilling your destiny." Atropos informed him. "So, are you interested or shall I just go?"

Atropos went to stand, only for Thomas to stop her. "Wait. What do you want in exchange for the name?"

"I can't give you a name." Atropos had promised her sister so she couldn't tell him. "But I can give you a hint."

"What do you want in return for this hint?" Thomas looked at Atropos over his champagne flute.

Atropos knew she would have to come clean. "While I can interact with you, I cannot actively prevent you from doing what you want. If you succeed as you're supposed to, I would have to bow to you, something I'm not about to do. All I want is to keep my position without interference from you."

"You're trying to tell me I'm destined to overthrow the immortal world?" Thomas found it a little hard to believe.

"Agree to my terms, and I'll tell you." Atropos knew from his face that he was going to take the bait.

"I'll agree to them on the proviso that if I find out you're lying or the information isn't worth anything, I will destroy you." Thomas promised. "And if you know me as you say you do, you'll know I don't make empty threats."

"Swear an oath to that effect and we've got a deal." Atropos refilled her glass before sitting back down and draping her legs over the side of the chair.

Thomas went to his drawer and pulled out a pain potion before making the requisite oath. After taking the potion, he turned to her. "So, what is it?"

"You're not just destined to overthrow the immortal world but also this world and all other mortal worlds that exist. However, there are four items in this world you need to do it. Unfortunately I don't know exactly what they are nor where they are being kept as my dear sister is refusing to tell me." Atropos gave a mischievous smile. "I can't think why she wouldn't trust me but I can tell you that they are located somewhere in Britain. I know that's not much help but it's as much as I can tell you."

Sitting in the chair opposite Atropos, Thomas mulled over what she had told him. "And my only threat?"

Atropos knew that he wouldn't have forgotten that part. "You were followed here from your world. My sisters and I did it as we intended to stop you. Obviously I thought better of that plan otherwise I wouldn't be here now."

"Do your sisters know you're here?" Thomas wondered if he was going to receive more visitors.

"No." Atropos swung her legs around so that she could get up. "And don't worry they couldn't visit you even if they found out. Lachesis, who kindly granted me a little mortal time, cannot use her gift herself, and Clotho has sworn never to walk among mortals again."

"So there are three of you?" Thomas wanted some idea of what he would be facing.

"Yes but as I've already said you've nothing to worry about from them." Atropos got up and stretched.

Thomas also rose to his feet. "If things work out as they're supposed to, then I promise that your position will be unassailable. Now if you'll excuse me, I have things to do."

Atropos walked over to him and laid her hand on his arm. "That's not quite true is it? I know you were planning to spend the night with your house guest but she stood you up, didn't she?"

Thomas raised an eyebrow. "What of it?"

"I thought we might spend a little time together instead. I've got a few spare hours." Atropos ran her hand up Thomas' arm to rest on his shoulder. "Unless of course, you'd prefer to do your paperwork instead."

Thomas pulled free, and walked over to his desk. "I'll bid you goodnight."

Atropos just laughed. "You must really like her."

"My feelings are my business." Thomas sat down. "Goodnight, Atropos."

"Goodnight, Thomas." Atropos disappeared.

The Next Morning

Mione finished packing and closed and shrank her trunk. She was about to leave the room to find Remus when a knock sounded on her door. Thinking it was Remus she hurried over to it. "Re... Thomas."

"May I come in?" Thomas asked politely.

Mione could feel her face burning as she remembered the note he'd left for her the previous night. "Of course."

Thomas walked in and closed the door. "Did you sleep well last night?"

Mione nodded nervously. "I did. And you?"

"I did, thank you." Thomas took hold of Mione's hand. "Why didn't you come to my room last night?"

Mione hadn't expected him to ask so bluntly but decided to answer honestly in return for his own frankness. "This is going to sound terribly gauche and I know you're probably not used to women turning you down but it was too soon. I wouldn't have felt comfortable."

Thomas looked regretful. "I apologize for presuming too much."

At Thomas' words, Mione relaxed. "It's me who should be apologizing if I led you to believe differently."

"You didn't. As I've just said, I presumed too much." Thomas ran his thumb over the back of Mione's hand. "Mione, if you're still interested after my blundering effort yesterday, I'd like to take you out to dinner on Monday night."

All of sudden, Mione found herself terribly aware of her hand. "I'd like that."

Thomas lifted her hand and kissed her knuckles lightly, letting his lips linger a moment longer than was considered polite. "Good. I hope you have a safe journey home."

At his words, Mione expected Thomas to let go of her hand, and was surprised when he didn't. "I was actually just about to see whether Remus was ready."

"I'll walk you down to his room." Thomas opened the door and led Mione along the corridor to Remus' room.

Mione felt a little flustered as she stood outside of the room with Thomas still holding her hand. "I'd best knock then."

Before she could, Thomas lifted his free hand and cupped Mione's face before brushing her lips with his own. Mione closed her eyes, only to open them again a few moments later when Thomas made no effort to deepen the kiss, instead keeping it light. "I'll see you at seven at your office on Monday."

"Seven." Mione didn't know what else to say.

Thomas released her, inclined his head and walked away.

18th April 2003 - Saturday, 11.30am (BST).

Mione apparated into H.J.'s home. "Hello?"

Harry came out of the kitchen. "I was beginning to get a little worried."

Mione kissed him on the cheek. "Sorry but we were delayed on the runway."

Harry returned the gesture. "Runway?"

"Thomas prefers to fly so we were held up at Charles De Gaulle by fog." Mione watched Harry's face fall. "Harry?"

Harry pulled himself together. "Sorry I was a little stunned that a wizard actually prefers to fly instead of apparating or portkeying."

"Thomas' family has a private jet they use for dealing with their Muggle business contacts. Thomas said that as the family has it, he may as well make use of it." Mione smirked. "Actually I think he gets portkey sick but doesn't want to admit it."

H.J. could hear the conversation from the sitting room, and walked out to meet Mione, giving her a hug. "So did you and Remus have a meeting in Paris with Seville then?"

Mione blushed. "Actually no. I had dinner with Thomas last night."

Harry felt his heart sink. "Did you have a nice time?"

"It was wonderful. Remus let me leave early so Thomas and I spent the afternoon at the Louvre." Mione went blithely on. "He then took me to dinner at the Pierre Gagnaire, which was close to the hotel we were staying in on the Champs-Élysées. The food there was amazing."

H.J. did what he knew Harry wouldn't. "I hope Thomas behaved himself."

Mione dug H.J. in the ribs. "I had my own room. He was a perfect gentleman as always." She didn't mention the note she'd received from Thomas the night before she'd returned from the conference.

Looking at Harry's stony face, H.J. made a suggestion. "Why don't you go start putting your memories in the pensieve? I'll be up in a little while."

"Where's Cammie?" Mione had expected Cammie to be there.

"Xander and Hermione took her to see a movie, but they should be back soon." H.J. began to make tea. "Do you want a cup?"

"I'd love one." Mione sat down at the counter. "So if they're out, why was Harry worried about where I was?"

"You know Harry. He worries about everything." H.J. handed over a cup of tea. "So how long have you been seeing Thomas?"

"Sort of since the conference began." Mione gave H.J. a tiny excitable grin. "He showed me around his house room by room. After each evening I spent with him, when I'd finished showering and returned to my room, I found that he'd left something for me."

H.J. was intrigued. "What sort of things?"

"A bookmark, perfume, earrings, and an evening wrap which matched the dress I wore to dinner the previous night." Mione sighed. "But my favorite thing I think was the chocolates he had flown in from Paris for me."

H.J. sat down opposite Mione. "He must really like you then. How often have you seen him since you got back?"

Mione put down her mug. "You seem awfully interested."

"I just want to make sure you're being well taken care of." H.J. knew that Harry would want to know even if he wouldn't ask himself.

"I am." Mione smiled a little nervously at H.J. "I don't what it is about him but I really like him, H.J. His manners are impeccable, and he treats me like a lady. But it's not only that; we've spent hours discussing Muggle problems as well as wizarding ones, and he

seems genuinely interested in my opinion. He said that he's even planning to use a few of my ideas, not that I'm entirely convinced I believe him."

H.J. suspected that Mione was falling for Thomas, and he felt dreadfully sorry for Harry. "Is it serious, Mione?"

"Honestly, I don't know." Mione started chewing her lip, as she always did when she was nervous. "When he asked me to dinner just before I left his house, I thought that he'd either cancel once I got back home or he'd take me to dinner and that would be it. However, when I got home from the conference my bedroom was full of the same yellow and white roses he'd given me when I stayed in his house. He'd also attached a note reiterating the invitation to dinner. After a slightly awkward start, it went really well and we've been out to dinner every night since Monday."

"Have you told him about us yet?" H.J. asked a little worriedly.

Mione could see he was concerned. "No. It's far too soon to be doing that, and I certainly won't do it without talking to you and Harry first."

"Thanks." H.J. heard the front door opening. "That will be Cammie."

The girl in question came racing into the kitchen. "Hi Dad." She smiled a little shyly at Mione as she'd hadn't seen very much of her since Christmas. "Hi Aunt Mione."

"Hi Cammie." Mione got up and gave the girl a hug. "Did you have a nice time?"

"Yes thank you." Cammie turned round to beam at Xander and Hermione. "Xander bought me the biggest tub of popcorn I've ever seen."

H.J. frowned at the man. "And Xander will be the one who will be cleaning up after you when you're sick tonight."

"I didn't let her have too much." Hermione reassured H.J. She then turned to Mione. "Mione."

Mione knew that she deserved the very lukewarm and reserved greeting. "Hello, Hermione, Xander."

"Hi." Xander could feel the tension between the two young women. "I'm going to go say hi to Harry. Is he upstairs?" Without waiting for confirmation, Xander left.

"I'll come with you." Hermione fled after Xander.

Mione smiled down at Cammie. "Do you think you could give me and H.J. a minute?"

Cammie left the room. Mione turned to H.J. "I'm sorry that was so awkward with Hermione."

"It's okay." H.J. put his mug into the sink. "What are you planning to do with Cammie today?"

"As Remus has given me next week off, Thomas has offered to fly us to his place off the coast of Florida for a long weekend. He thought Cammie might like a day at the beach tomorrow." Mione crossed her fingers. "I told Thomas that you and Harry had dates and I was babysitting Cammie, which is why he made the offer. But I said that I'd have to check with you first if it's alright."

"Before I make a decision about Cammie, I should say that in addition to telling Hermione and Xander, we'd like to tell Orion as well." Katherine didn't want Orion outside of the loop as the two of them had now been dating for four months, and Katherine didn't like hiding things from her boyfriend.

Mione didn't mind. "That's fine. Are they coming here?"

"Yes, he and the girls should be here in about half an hour." H.J. decided he'd let Mione take Cammie. "On reflection I think taking Cammie out is a good idea, as I don't really want her asking why everyone's here and she's not included in what's going on. When do you plan to bring her back?"

"Monday. H.J., I know you're likely to be worried about her being so far away." Mione pulled out a necklace. "This is an international portkey that Remus got for me in case of an emergency. If there are any problems while we're flying or, if heaven forbid, she manages to somehow get separated from me, this will take her to my bedroom in Remus' home."

H.J. felt reassured by Mione's gesture. "What's the activation word?"

Mione put down the portkey and grinned. "It's actually a phrase. Dad's a terrible flier."

"Thanks very much." H.J. responded sarcastically as he picked up the portkey.

Mione smirked. "I changed it to something I knew Cammie wouldn't say accidentally."

H.J. excused himself and ten minutes later he came back downstairs with an excitable Cammie, who was carrying an overnight bag. "She's ready."

"Am I really going on a plane?" Cammie had gotten over her initial apprehension at seeing Mione.

"You are." Mione held out her hand. "I just need to pop home and pick up a few things before we go."

H.J. watched as his daughter and Mione vanished. Only once they'd gone did Harry step into the kitchen. "You did warn me about not getting my hopes up, didn't you?"

"I'm really sorry, Harry." H.J. could see that Harry was upset. "Do you actually want to cancel and do this tomorrow instead?"

"No, I'd rather get it done and over with." Harry gave H.J. a tight smile before walking out of the kitchen. "Let me know when the others arrive."

Later that evening - 6.30 (BST)

As Harry and H.J. finished talking, Hermione frowned. "So why tell us now?"

"I wanted to tell you and Xander before Christmas but Mione refused to let me." Harry began to take his memories out of the pensieve.

Orion, who was sitting with his arm around Katherine's waist, looked around the group. "Does anyone else know or is it just us?"

Harry told him about the one adult they'd decided on being the person to trust. "We'd decided the weekend before Mione and I split up that we were going to tell Remus. After working with him, Mione agreed that he was trustworthy, and would take it in his stride, which he did."

"I'd trust Uncle Remus with my life." Cassandra sighed. "I just wish you'd let me tell Dad."

"I can't, Cass." H.J. had adopted Orion's shortening of her name, and for the first time in her life, Cassandra hadn't complained about it. "Although I'd like to trust your Dad, he's too focused on doing the right thing."

Orion agreed with H.J. "I think H.J.'s right, Cass. Dad would have a meltdown if he found out what was going on. I think we should only tell him if we get into trouble."

"That's agreed then." H.J. began to pull his own memories out of the pensieve now that Harry had finished. "So does anyone have any questions?"

"I'm just going with the flow." Having seen some weird things in his time, Xander was probably the least shocked out of the group who'd just been told. "If I think of anything, I'll ask."

"This is why you were so interested in Thomas Seville, wasn't it?" Hermione remembered H.J.'s curiosity about the man the previous Christmas.

"Yes but you blew our theories about him out of the water." H.J. watched pleasure cross Hermione's face as she realized she'd contributed something useful. "Also, from what Mione told me today he's the exact opposite of Voldemort; interested in Muggles and their problems, charming and willing to listen."

"Which is probably a good thing as it turns out that Mione's now dating him." Harry tried and failed to keep the bitterness he was feeling out of his voice.

Cassandra hadn't been aware that Mione had starting seeing someone. "She's dating Thomas Seville?"

H.J. nodded. "Apparently since the conference began but it only started to get serious after she returned."

Cassandra knew that Harry still liked her friend. "Harry, it's only been three weeks since the start of conference. It's a little too soon for it be serious."

With his enhanced hearing, Harry had been able to hear the entire conversation H.J. and Mione had had. "I think it is. She and Cammie have actually gone to his place for the weekend." Harry got up. "I'm sorry to cut and run but I have to be somewhere else."

H.J. raised an eyebrow. "You have a date?"

"Not exactly." Harry hadn't told H.J. because he knew that he'd behave just like this. "I'm meeting Aditi for dinner."

Luna giggled. "It sounds like a date to me."

"She's engaged to be married, Luna." Harry put a stop to the date theory there and then. "Her parents are away and she's a little lonely. I ran into her the other night when I was in Hogsmeade. She knows that I'm not interested in her romantically so she asked if I'd have dinner with her."

Xander sighed. "I know she's taken but why do you and H.J. get all the pretty ones? The rest of us might like a crack at some of them."

Luna hid her hurt. "Because he's a good listener."

Harry kissed Luna on the cheek, making her smile. "Thanks for the compliment but this listener has really got to go and get showered. I'll see you all later if you're still up."

Claridges - 10PM (BST)

Harry looked over his glass of wine. "Why did you pick a Muggle restaurant, Aditi?"

"I like the food here." Aditi glanced around the restaurant. "And you have to admit you can't fault the ambiance."

"I get the feeling that there's something you're not telling me." Harry had been able to detect a slight nervousness underlying Aditi's usually easygoing manner.

"You're very perceptive." Aditi put down her fork. "When I spoke to you on Wednesday, you mentioned that one of the Muggleborns from Hogwarts was living at your house."

"It's not my house, Aditi." Harry had accidentally mentioned Hermione's name. "It's H.J.'s and it was at his behest that she's living there."

"Are you happy about it?" Aditi asked cautiously.

Harry suddenly knew what the dinner had really been for and lied. "Not exactly. Would you be?"

"No. I don't like Muggleborns. I don't think they should be allowed in our world. They don't fit in and they make people uncomfortable." Aditi scowled as she talked about them. "I'll be frank with you. I chose this restaurant so that we wouldn't be overheard by the wrong people."

Harry leant forward. "So why are you telling me this?"

"I'm part of an underground organization that wants to change the laws about Muggleborns. We disagree with Dumbledore's policies and want him out." Aditi explained. "And we have every intention of getting him out in any way possible."

"So why not just openly run against him?" Harry asked.

"Because while many of the wizarding world feel the same way as we do, most are loath to go against Dumbledore. He's been entrenched in his position for far too long." Aditi disliked the Minister immensely. "It's his fault we have to put up with Muggleborns at all."

"So are we talking a simple coup or is it more than that?" Harry asked bluntly.

"It depends on how things go. I can't tell you anymore than that at the moment." Aditi passed a coin over to Harry. "This is an invitation to join the group I'm part of."

"You've taken quite a chance in telling me this. How do you know I won't simply leave here and tell someone about our discussion?" Harry pocketed the coin.

Aditi looked behind Harry's shoulder. "I brought insurance with me."

Harry had felt as if he'd been being watched. "So if I'd said no, I'd be a dead man."

Aditi shook her head. "No, you'd have been apprehended as you left and obliviated."

"So who heads this group?" Harry already knew but he didn't know what name Voldemort was operating under in this world.

"You'll meet him at the meeting I've set up for you." Aditi stood up. "It's on Tuesday night at seven. The coin will act as a timed portkey."

"I look forward to it." Harry stood up politely. "If you want to wait I'll escort you home after I get the bill."

“One of my associates will deal with it.” Aditi informed Harry. “Before you go, I need an oath from you, Harry, that you won’t discuss this meeting with anyone.”

Harry felt trapped but he needed the introduction to Voldemort. Sitting back down, Harry discreetly withdrew his wand, invoked a notice-me-not charm, and did as Aditi requested, pretending to be hit by pain as the oath took effect.

“I’m sorry to have to ask you to do that, Harry.” Aditi handed over a vial. “But I have to protect us. The vial contains pain relief.”

Harry took the potion and slipped it into his pocket. “I’ll take the potion once I’m lying down. You’ll forgive me if I don’t see you home.”

“Goodnight, Harry.” Aditi nodded politely as Harry left.

Harry glanced quickly around the restaurant but didn’t see anyone he recognized. He guessed that whoever it was Aditi had brought with her had been polyjuiced, as Harry usually had no problem discerning a glamour. Going into the bathroom and finding it empty, Harry disappeared.

The Island - Saturday 6.30PM (EST)/11.30 PM (BST)

Once the plane had landed in Miami, Thomas apparated all three of them to his house. “This way.”

Cammie looked around the room that Thomas had led her into. “This is huge.”

“I hope you like it.” Thomas opened a cupboard. “There are books in here if you care to read. Unfortunately, or fortunately as far as I’m concerned, electronics don’t work here so I’m afraid there’s no television.”

“Thank you.” Cammie was still a little shy around Thomas, having slept for most of the crossing, the jet’s engines lulling her to sleep despite her efforts to stay awake.

"It's my pleasure." Thomas led the way over to the bathroom. "This is yours."

Cammie gaped at the huge tub in the middle of the room. "I could swim in that."

"There's actually a pool at the back of the house, so you can swim there." Thomas smiled at the young girl's obvious delight. "Dinner will be in an hour so if you want to get showered and changed, Mione will come back and get you." He turned to Mione. "I've linked wards in this room to your own room so you'll know if she gets into any trouble."

Mione smiled at Cammie. "Will you be alright if I go and get showered and changed?"

"I'll be fine." Cammie was already unpacking her clothes. "But you won't be long, will you?"

"I'll be back in under an hour." Mione promised.

Thomas followed Mione out. "She's still very anxious about being alone, isn't she?"

"She's a lot better than she was." Mione pushed open her bedroom door. "Thank you for being so kind to her."

"She's a nice child. It's hard not to be." Thomas' face darkened. "Her parents should have been made to pay for what they did to her."

"I couldn't agree more." Mione had been disgusted at their behavior. "But Cammie didn't need that on her conscience."

Thomas' face cleared. "I'm sorry. That was a little heavy."

"I feel the same way." Mione assured him. "I think I'd better get ready."

"Can I come in for a moment? I have something I want to ask you." Thomas followed Mione into the room when she stepped aside to let him in.

"What is it?" Mione started to chew her lip worriedly.

"It's nothing to worry about." Thomas had spotted Mione's usual telltale sign.

Mione stopped chewing on her lip. "I really must stop doing that."

Thomas smiled affectionately at her. "It's what makes you you. I wanted to ask if you'd mind if I portkeyed Cammie home on Monday morning instead of you flying back with her."

Mione refused. "I can't let you do that. Cammie is my responsibility."

"Very well." Thomas thought for a moment. "How about if you portkey home with her and then portkey back here?"

"Why were you going to portkey her?" Mione asked. "I thought you preferred to fly."

Thomas had admitted to hating portkey travel on the flight over. "The jet is on its way to Sydney as my family requires it to fly to England for some Muggle business tomorrow night, and I need to return to England because something has cropped up that I need to attend to. I wasn't sure if it was going to happen or not which is why I didn't mention it previously. I only found out when the pilot passed me a message just before we left the aircraft."

Mione had watched Thomas read the note the pilot had handed over before placing it in his pocket. She laid a hand on Thomas' arm. "I know how busy you are and I understand that you have work to do. How long will you be gone?"

Thomas laid his own hand on top of Mione's. "I'm probably going to leave England either late Tuesday or early Wednesday. The jet should be free by then. As I was already returning to England, I thought if I took Cammie back it would save you from having to go."

Mione was touched by Thomas' thoughtfulness. "I'll portkey her back on Monday after breakfast. I can return on Monday night if you don't mind."

"I don't." Thomas let his fingers caress Mione's hand. "I'm glad you agreed to spend the week here."

Mione suddenly felt nervous. "Remus agreed that we both needed some time off and I'd be a fool to turn down a week in the sun."

"Mione, relax." Thomas lifted Mione's hand and placed a kiss into her palm. "I'll leave you to get ready and I'll see you at dinner."

As Thomas left, Mione hurried into the bathroom to take a quick shower.

Tuesday Morning - 11AM (BST)

Because of the time difference, Cammie had arrived home at lunchtime on Monday and told anyone who'd listen what a good time she'd had. By the time Tuesday morning had arrived, and she still hadn't given up talking about it, Harry had had enough and finally snapped. "For goodness sake, Cammie. I really don't want to hear any more about Thomas and his bloody plane."

Cammie's face crumpled and H.J. grabbed Harry by the arm and dragged him out of the room. "Harry, I understand you're hurting about Mione but if you ever talk to my daughter like that again, I swear I'll make you sorry you were ever born."

Harry let out a shuddering breath. "I'm sorry. I'd better apologize and then I'll get out of everyone's hair."

Cammie was being comforted by Hermione when Harry re-entered the sitting room. He knelt down in front of her. "I apologize for talking to you like I did, Cammie. I'm in a bad mood and I took it out on you."

"Is it because you like Aunt Mione still?" Cammie's voice came out in a hiccuping sob. "And she's with Thomas now?"

“Yes.” Harry admitted to his niece. “But that still doesn’t give me the right to speak to you like that. I’m really sorry and it will never happen again.”

Cammie pulled free from Hermione and wrapped her arms around Harry’s neck. “I still love you.”

Harry felt his throat close up. “And I love you too.”

Cammie stayed hugging Harry for a moment before kissing him on the cheek. “You’ll find someone else.”

Harry smiled and kissed Cammie on the forehead. “Thank you. I’m going out. I’ll see everyone later.”

Wednesday Morning - 1PM (EST)/6PM (BST)

Mione rolled over in bed and smiled as she remembered where she was. After getting dressed she wandered into the dining room and helped herself to the orange juice and toast that the house-elves had set out before making her way onto the verandah outside of her bedroom. After finishing, she lay back on the lounge and closed her eyes, relishing the feel of the sun on her skin. Several hours later she jumped slightly as she felt a pair of lips brush across her own. Her stomach flip-flopped as the kiss deepened and she lifted her arms to wrap them around Thomas’ neck.

After a few minutes, Thomas reluctantly ended the kiss and pulled away. “Now that’s what I call a welcome.”

Mione went red. “Did you have a good flight?”

“Yes.” Thomas sat on the edge of the lounge and looked down at Mione. “I hope you don’t mind but we’ve got guests.”

Mione sat up. “Of course I don’t mind. It’s your house, Thomas.”

“They’re freshening up at the moment.” Thomas informed her.

Mione looked down at the very casual clothes she was wearing. "I'll go get changed."

Thomas stopped her. "You don't have to if you don't want to."

Mione shook her head and headed into her bedroom. "I can't meet people looking like this."

Thomas grabbed Mione's hand and pulled her to him. "I don't care what you look like but I'm touched you care enough that you want to make a good impression on my family."

Mione was hit by a wave of nerves. "Family?"

"My parents and brother." Thomas watched Mione pale slightly. "Don't worry they don't bite. They just want to meet the woman I'm dating."

"But I'm a nobody." Mione began to panic. "And it's far too soon to meet them."

Thomas kissed her briefly. "I couldn't disagree more. I think you're a very special somebody, and so will my family."

Mione knew she must have looked like a fish out of water as her mouth opened and closed and nothing came out.

"Mione, calm down." Thomas lowered his head and kissed her again. "We'll be on the dining room verandah." He then apparated out of the room.

Mione was aware that Thomas liked her a great deal as he hadn't hid how he felt but she was also aware that meeting his parents meant that things were moving along quicker than she'd expected. Knowing she couldn't stand there forever, she opened the door to her closet and began to rummage through it for something suitable to wear.

Earlier that day - 11AM (BST)

H.J. opened the front door to find Sirius Black standing there. "Lord Black."

"H.J., I've said before it's just Sirius." Sirius didn't smile though. "Can I come in?"

H.J. stepped back. "What brings you here?"

"Camellia does." Sirius glanced around. "Is she here?"

"She's in the sitting room with Harry and Hermione." H.J. presumed that Sirius was aware that Hermione was living there.

"Is there somewhere I can talk to you in private?" Sirius guessed that the house probably wouldn't have a study.

He was right. "We can talk in the kitchen. Let me just ask Cammie to stay in the sitting room." H.J. popped his head into the room in question. "Cammie, I need to speak to someone in private. Can you please stay in here with Harry and Hermione?"

"Yes, Dad." Cammie, who was engrossed in the book she was reading, barely even registered H.J.'s question and answered automatically.

H.J. led Sirius into the kitchen. "Can I get you anything to drink?"

"No thanks. I'm actually here in an official capacity." Sirius closed the door and invoked a privacy spell.

H.J. was suddenly worried. "You're not going to take Cammie away, are you?"

Sirius allayed his fears. "Not at all. From what Cassie and Katherine have told me, you're doing an excellent job with her. It's about the Dursleys."

"They're not going to let them go, are they?" H.J. couldn't believe that the Wizengamot would change their minds.

Sirius looked closely at H.J. as he passed on what he needed to. "No. They're dead, H.J."

"But..." H.J. stopped speaking and stared back at Sirius.

"I need to question everyone connected to Camellia including Harry and Miss Granger. Obviously I won't question Camellia." Sirius had a duty to follow but he didn't want to distress Cammie unnecessarily.

"Why is the head of Auror Division doing this? I would have thought you'd have sent one of your men out." H.J. wasn't bothered it was Sirius, just that it seemed a little of place.

"Cassie asked me to do it when I told her what had happened." Sirius had another reason as well. "And we've never had deaths like this before in Azkaban."

"I take it they were murdered then." H.J. guessed that Sirius wouldn't have been dealing with it if had been a simple death.

"Brutally murdered covers it." Sirius had gone to the prison himself to see the bodies. "The healers at the prison said from what they can work out the Dursleys were paralyzed by snake venom and then slowly tortured to death."

"Obviously if they were paralyzed they couldn't cry out." H.J. observed. "So what do you need to ask me?"

"Where you were yesterday?" Sirius hated asking but knew he had to.

"I spent it with Cammie and Hermione." H.J. took his wallet out of his pocket and pulled out the stubs from the movie they'd seen together with a receipt from dinner.

"Sorry, but I had to ask." Sirius apologized. "Didn't Harry go with you?"

H.J. shook his head. "I don't know where Harry was."

Sirius knew he'd have to question Harry as well. "Can you ask him to come in?"

H.J. disappeared, returning with Harry after a few moments. "Do you need me to go?"

Both Harry and Sirius shook their heads. "I take it this is something important, Sirius."

Sirius told Harry about the Dursleys' deaths. "I'm sorry to ask but I need to know where you were yesterday, Harry."

"I spent the morning in Hogsmeade before going into London." Harry scowled. "You can't seriously believe I broke into Azkaban?"

"Harry, I simply need to rule you out." Sirius said quietly. "Can you tell me if anyone saw you?"

Harry unholstered his wand forcing Sirius to do the same. "Sorry, I should have warned you. I'm just going to swear an oath."

Sirius didn't lower his wand. "Go ahead."

"I swear on my life and my magic that I had nothing to do with the Dursleys' murders." Harry pretended to crumple a little as he finished the oath.

Sirius let out a sigh of relief. "That's good enough to rule you out."

H.J. kept up the pretence and got Harry a glass of water. "Drink this." H.J. then turned to Sirius. "How did the killer get past the Dementors?"

"Dementors?" Sirius looked at H.J. as if he'd gone mad. "What on earth makes you think we'd use something like Dementors at Azkaban?"

H.J. lied quickly to cover up his mistake. "I just thought I'd read something about it."

"It was considered some time ago but the Minister felt it would be too barbaric." Sirius shook his head and gave a small laugh. "Dementors! We have regular guards just like any other prison."

Harry was stunned to find out that Dementors didn't form part of its protection. "I thought Azkaban was one of the most secure prisons in the world."

"It is. There are layers and layers of wards over it, as well as other protections that I'm obviously not going to go into." Sirius informed him. "To say nothing of it's difficult to find if you don't know where it is."

"Yet you thought we knew." H.J. pointed out.

"No I didn't." Sirius denied H.J.'s accusation. "I just had to rule you out of my enquiries." He then turned back to the subject of Cammie. "Do you want me to tell Camellia?"

"No. I'll do it." H.J. wasn't looking forward to it but knew he had to. "At least she's not in school this week."

"I'd best be off." Sirius held out his hand and shook both H.J.'s and Harry's hands. "I'm sorry I had to ask you like this."

"We understand." From holding the same position as Sirius now held, Harry knew exactly what it was like to have to question someone you considered a friend. "Say hi to Cassandra and Orion for us."

"I will." Sirius smiled at H.J. "Faith said to say hi to you."

H.J. gave a wry smile. "I don't know how you managed to get her to marry you."

Sirius winked. "It's obviously my charming personality." He then became serious once more. "I really am sorry about the Dursleys."

"Thanks Sirius." Harry nodded and the man vanished.

H.J. sat down on a stool. "Shit."

“Do you want me to take Hermione off somewhere while you tell Cammie, or do you want me to stay?” Harry wasn’t sure how H.J. was going to do it.

“Stay.” H.J. got up. “Let’s get this done.”

Cammie barely glanced up as the two men came into the room but Hermione noticed the serious looks on their faces. “Harry?”

Harry just shook his head in silence. H.J. knelt down in front of Cammie. “Cammie, can you put down the book for me?”

Cammie suddenly felt frightened at the severe look on H.J.’s face. “Dad?”

“I’m afraid I’ve got some bad news for you.” H.J. said gently.

Cammie’s face crumpled. “You’re sending me away?”

H.J. shook his head. “Never. Cammie, it’s about your parents.”

“They’re not my parents.” Cammie snapped. “You’re my Dad.”

H.J. felt his heart expand with love with the girl. “Okay then, it’s about the Dursleys.”

“They can’t have me back.” Cammie’s greatest fear was that she’d have to go back.

“That’s never going to happen.” H.J. took her hand. “I’m so sorry, Cammie but they were both attacked while they were in prison.”

“Are they...?” Cammie couldn’t bring herself to say the word.

H.J. nodded. “I’m really sorry.”

“I’m not.” Cammie spat out her words, taking everyone in the room by surprise. “I’m glad they’re dead.”

H.J. didn't know what to say but Harry did. "Cammie, I know you don't mean that."

"Yes I do." Cammie by now was struggling to contain her tears.

"No, you don't." Harry said softly.

Cammie burst into tears and flung herself onto H.J. "I hate them, Dad. I hate them."

"I know, Cammie." H.J. rocked her as she cried.

Hermione watched the scene in silence before leaving the room. Harry followed her out. "I'm sorry you didn't get any warning."

"It's not your fault Harry." Hermione rubbed her arms. "I feel terrible saying this but I'm glad that they can't ever harm Cammie again."

"So am I." Harry admitted. "I don't even feel sorry that..." Harry didn't get a chance to say anything more as H.J. came into the kitchen carrying Cammie. "She wants to lie down and she wants Hermione to stay with her."

Hermione followed H.J. and Cammie out of the room and up the stairs. H.J. lowered Cammie onto his bed before turning round to face Hermione who was hovering uncomfortably in the doorway. "Come in."

Cammie held out her arms to Hermione who, after kicking off her shoes, climbed onto the bed and took the crying girl into her arms, rocking her. Cammie lifted her head. "I want Dad as well."

It was H.J.'s turn to feel uncomfortable as he climbed onto the bed on the other side of his daughter and had little choice except to wrap his arms around both Hermione and Cammie.

Hermione held herself stiff for a few moments before eventually having to relax and lie her head on H.J.'s shoulder as they held Cammie between them.

Hours later Hermione woke up to find that she was lying on her side with her back to the other two. Cammie and H.J. were talking softly. "Dad, I wish Aunt Hermione was my mum."

H.J. felt his stomach go into freefall. "Cammie, Hermione loves you very much but she can't be your mum."

"I know she's not really but can't I call her that?" Cammie sounded almost desperate.

H.J. wanted to give into her pleading but knew he couldn't. "No, Cammie. You can't."

Hermione didn't want to hear any more and acted as if she was just waking up. "What time is it?"

Both H.J.'s and Cammie's heads swung round at the sound of Hermione's voice. "Almost six."

Hermione sat up and rubbed her eyes. "Sorry, I didn't mean to fall asleep."

"You obviously needed it." H.J. said quietly.

"I'll leave you two alone." Hermione slid off the bed before smiling at Cammie. "If you need me, even if it's the middle of night, come in, okay?"

Cammie nodded. "I will Aunt Hermione."

With that Hermione let herself out of the bedroom and headed downstairs.

Note: I included British Summer Time (BST) and Eastern Standard Time (EST) to make it easier to relate to the time difference between Florida and England. This was mostly for me though!

Next chapter: Harry has a meeting; the body count continues to rise; Hermione's first kiss; Harry decides to move on with his life.

Tuesday, 22nd April 2003

At 7 o'clock Harry felt the familiar tug of a portkey as the coin activated and he found himself standing in a large, ornately decorated room. A man in a gold mask was sitting in front of a fireplace with two white masked men flanking him on either side. Harry noted that one of the masks had an embossed snake on it. The gold-masked man got up. "It's very nice to meet you, Harry."

"I'm afraid you have me at a disadvantage." Harry held out his hand.

The man shook it. "Dominus."

Harry rode through the waves of pain that emanated from touching the man's hand. "I'm pleased to meet you."

"Even though you've been told the gist of why you're here, you don't really know what I expect from you, do you?" Dominus held out a hand towards a seat. "Please sit down."

Harry was a little taken aback at the hospitality; he'd expected to stand. "Thank you, and you're right, I don't."

Dominus seated himself again. "As Aditi told you, we are part of a group who disagrees with Muggleborns being allowed to live in our world. However, as it's been less than ten years since Voldemort was defeated, people are still a little reticent about expressing their opinions too openly against Muggleborns."

Harry disagreed. "I've noticed schoolchildren aren't quite so reluctant."

Dominus smiled behind his mask. "That's because they don't really know any better as most of them can't remember what it was like when Voldemort was trying to take over."

"You might be right." Harry knew he was. "So why ask me to join? I'm not exactly rich, powerful or connected."

"Because we need to monitor the treatment of Muggleborns in a school environment, and you work in Hogwarts." Dominus answered smoothly. "I need to get a case together for banning them from the school; show the wizarding world that it is for the benefit of Muggleborns that we revert to the old laws. You can help me do that."

Harry didn't believe that that was all Dominus wanted but acted as if he did. "That's all?"

"Yes. I don't expect you to do any dark and insidious deeds for me." Dominus had no intention of telling Harry that eventually that that was exactly what he'd expect from the young man sitting in front of him. "Just keep an eye on how the Muggleborns are treated by the other students. If they're attacked; if they're made to feel welcome; that sort of thing."

Harry pretended to consider what Dominus had said. "You do know I can't be seen to be discriminating against Mudbloods don't you?"

Dominus smirked to himself as Harry reverted to the more unsavory description of Muggleborns. "Which is why I'm merely asking you to monitor them. You certainly have a head start with one of them living in your house. She should be a fount of knowledge as to what it's like to be a Mudblood in Hogwarts."

Harry knew Aditi had to have told him about Hermione. "I have to be honest and say that I'm surprised you approached me at all knowing that Granger lives with us."

"From what I've been told you're not exactly enamored of having the Mudblood live in your home." Dominus further confirmed Harry's suspicion that Aditi had filled the man in on the entirety of their conversation.

"I'm not." Harry lied. "But as I also told Aditi, the house doesn't belong to me, but to my brother."

"Why did he even ask her to live there at all?" Dominus had been puzzled by H.J.'s actions.

Harry wished he could see the man's face. He was used to gauging people by their expressions. "Because he found out that she was being beaten by her parents for being magical."

Dominus scowled behind his mask. "That sheds a different light on the matter then. Akin to your brother, I don't believe someone should be punished for their abilities. However, I wouldn't go so far as to house a Mudblood. I would have simply killed the parents."

Harry felt a cold shiver go down his spine as he thought about the Dursleys. "H.J. might have taken Granger in but I don't think he's willing to commit murder for her."

"I understand." Dominus stood up. "Harry, I'm afraid I'm going to have to cut this meeting short as I have another appointment to attend to, but before I leave I need to know if you're interested. If you are, then we can set up another meeting to talk in more detail."

"And if I'm not?" Harry decided to see how far the man he was fairly sure was Voldemort was willing to go.

"You'll simply be obliviated." Dominus pulled out his wand. "So, Harry, what's it to be?"

May 10th 2003 - Hogwarts

H.J. opened the door to find Sirius standing outside. "Sirius, come in."

Sirius followed H.J. inside. "I'm sorry H.J. but I need to know where you were last night."

"I was holding a detention with Ron Weasley until ten. After that I came back here." H.J. indicated that Sirius should sit down. "What's going on?"

"Hermione Granger's parents were found murdered in their dental practice. They were discovered this morning by their dental nurse." Sirius shuddered as he remembered the bloody scene he'd been called to. "Obviously the Muggle police were involved but as their daughter is magical, we were alerted as well."

H.J. frowned. "Talk about déjà vu; first the Dursleys, and now the Grangers. So before you ask, Harry spent the evening with Xander Harris in Hogsmeade. I expect Rosmerta could testify to their being there. They both arrived back here just after I got back and we spent a couple of hours playing cards, after which Xander crashed here. I should have gone to Hogsmeade as well last night but Snape assigned Weasley's detention to me. So none of us are responsible unless you think Cammie or Hermione herself did it."

Sirius pulled a face at the mention of Snape's name. "No, I don't."

"What happened to the Grangers then?" H.J. poured out a glass of red wine. "Would you like one?"

Sirius had had a rough day. "I would, thank you." Sirius took a mouthful before answering H.J.'s first question. "They were tortured with their own dental instruments. We think that whoever killed them made sure they couldn't scream aloud by cutting out their tongues first."

H.J. found that he wasn't particularly bothered. "Do you suspect someone magical?"

"No but as with the Dursleys I needed to question everyone connected to Hermione Granger." Sirius had checked and no trace of any magical activity had been found in the room. "They were tied up using pantyhose and a necktie before being tortured and left to bleed to death."

"It still could have been magical." H.J. observed.

"Entry was gained through a side door. Whoever did it smashed a window and unlocked the door by reaching in through the broken window according to the Muggle police." Sirius had double-checked everything. "So unlike the Dursleys this wasn't done by a wizard. They would have just apparated in."

H.J. sighed. "I can't say I really care that they're dead. Has Hermione been told yet?"

“Yes. I told her a couple of hours ago.” Sirius took another mouthful of wine. “She didn’t even cry. After I’d finished telling her, she simply excused herself and tried to leave the room. Poppy thinks she’s in shock. She’s going to keep her in the hospital ward overnight.”

“I’ll drop by and see her.” H.J. thought that Hermione would probably be feeling awful once the shock started to wear off. “How much detail did you go into?”

“I just told her that it was apparently an attempted robbery that had gone wrong.” Sirius finished off his wine. “We’re keeping the details out of the Muggle press.”

“Thanks.” H.J. stood up. “You don’t have to go. You can help yourself to another glass of wine if you want to.”

“I’d better not.” Sirius shook H.J.’s hand. “I want to drop by and see if my daughter’s still up before I go. I’ve approved her application to the Auror Corps.”

H.J. knew Cassandra would be ecstatic. The two men left H.J.’s rooms, H.J. heading up to the hospital ward and Sirius heading off to see Cassandra. Poppy came out as she heard the door open. “I know no-one can be outside flying this late at night and you don’t look sick, so what can I do for you, H.J.?”

H.J. smiled. “I’m actually here to see Hermione Granger.”

Unaware that Hermione was now living in H.J.’s house, Poppy couldn’t hide her surprise that H.J. even knew the Muggleborn. “She’s in the private room at the end on the left. I’ve tried to give her some calming potion but she keeps on protesting she’s fine.”

H.J. knocked on the door and put his head around it. Hermione put down her book and smiled as she saw him. “H.J.”

“Hermione, I’m so sorry about your parents.” H.J. could see that Sirius was right; Hermione didn’t look as if she’d shed a single tear.

"Thanks but I'm not that upset about it." Hermione sat back down. "It's ridiculous Madam Pomfrey insists on keeping me in here."

"You're not sad that they're dead?" H.J. sat down on the bed.

"I don't feel anything to be truthful." Hermione looked up at H.J. "They were just two people whose house I once shared."

H.J. thought that she was still obviously in shock as Poppy thought. "Do you want me to stay with you? I'm not planning on doing anything for the rest of the night."

"You don't have to pander to me, H.J. I'm fine." Hermione picked up her book. "I have some reading that I need to get done for next week."

"If you need me, you know where I am." H.J. got up and headed out before stopping at Poppy's office. "Poppy, if she becomes upset, don't hesitate to let me know."

"I will." Poppy promised.

However, Hermione got through the night without needing calming potions or H.J.

One week later

H.J. put his arm around Hermione as they stood at the gravesides. He whispered softly to her. "Are you alright?"

Hermione looked almost dazed. "Fine."

H.J. knew then that it was finally sinking in. "Lean on me."

Hermione watched as first her stepfather's, and then her mother's coffin were lowered into the graves. "Why didn't she love me, H.J.?"

"I don't know, Hermione." H.J. could feel little tremors starting to wrack Hermione's body.

As the Minister ended the service, Hermione stepped forward and threw the requisite handful of dirt onto each of the coffins before stepping back and letting H.J. hold her again.

H.J. was aware of the sympathetic glances that Hermione was receiving. "We just have to get through this afternoon, Hermione."

Hermione felt like an automaton as she smiled as she received people's commiserations. Eventually, however, there was just her and H.J. left. She tried to smile at H.J. and failed. "I, err, I.."

H.J. held out his arms and Hermione went into them, burying her face in his chest as she finally broke down and cried. "Just let it all out."

Hermione stood and cried all over H.J.'s white shirt before lifting her head. "I'm sorry you had to waste your day here with me."

H.J. gently pushed her hair out of her eyes. "I wasn't going to leave you to go through this alone. Harry wanted to be here as well but he couldn't get the day off as Remus is away, and with his transformation tonight we didn't think it would be a good idea."

"I know. He came and saw me yesterday afternoon." Hermione let H.J. rub soothing circles over her back as she hid her face once more. "Are you going back to Hogwarts tonight?"

H.J. could only just about understand what Hermione was saying as she didn't lift her head to ask her question. "No. I'm going to stay here with you."

"I don't want to stay in this house." Hermione still didn't look up.

At her words, H.J. simply apparated them to his house and into her bedroom. "Why don't you go get showered and get into bed?"

Hermione shook her head and kept her face tucked into his chest. "I just want to be held."

H.J. looked at Hermione's small bed and apparated them both into his own room, before disentangling Hermione from him and lying down the bed. "Come and lie down."

Hermione didn't need asking twice. "Why didn't she love me, H.J?" Hermione asked the same question she'd asked at the graveside.

"Because she couldn't see what a wonderful daughter she'd got." H.J. had an answer for her this time. "It was her loss."

"She'll never love me now." Hermione glanced up at H.J., tears streaming down her face. "Am I so awful?"

"Don't ever think that!" H.J. used his free hand to stroke Hermione's cheek. "You are not awful."

"I must be; she never wanted me." Hermione sniffled. "I did everything I could when I was growing up to try and gain her approval but nothing ever worked. She made me feel like nothing."

H.J. stroked her hair. "You are not nothing, Hermione. My daughter thinks the world of you." H.J. waited for Hermione to look at him again before finishing what he wanted to say. "Just know that you're not alone in this world. Cammie cares for you, as do Harry and I."

Hermione noticed that he didn't add Mione. "I don't think Mione is ever going to like me."

"She was just jealous of your and Harry's friendship." H.J. told Hermione what he'd told Harry months earlier.

"But I've never once thought of Harry like that." Hermione wasn't exactly surprised but she'd never once had feelings for Harry that weren't above board.

"I know." H.J. continued to stroke her hair. "Anyway, it doesn't matter now. Mione's with someone new."

"And she still doesn't like me." Hermione gave a tremulous smile. "But you're right it doesn't matter."

“Hey.” H.J. cupped her face. “I care about you. I hope that counts for something.”

“Really?” Hermione asked needing the reassurance.

“Really.” H.J. placed a soft kiss on her cheek. “And I’m here for you.”

Hermione felt her heart miss a beat at H.J.’s touch. “I don’t know what I would have done without you today.”

H.J. gave a smile. “What else are friends for?”

“Thank you.” Hermione then leant forward and went to place a kiss on H.J.’s cheek, just as he turned his head meaning that their lips connected instead.

As he felt Mione’s lips brush against his own, H.J. immediately became aware of how closely Hermione was molded to his body, which was beginning to react to her closeness. “I think I’d better move.”

Not realizing H.J.’s problem, Hermione frowned. “H.J.?”

H.J. knew that Hermione hadn’t worked it out. “Hermione, if I don’t move, things are going to get very embarrassing very quickly.”

Hermione suddenly realized what H.J. meant and became flustered. “I’m sorry; I didn’t mean to do anything.”

H.J. sighed. “Hermione, calm down.”

As H.J. went to pull away, Hermione grabbed his arm. “Please don’t leave me alone.”

H.J. hesitated. “Hermione, I really don’t think it’s a good idea if I stay here any longer.”

“Please.” Hermione didn’t want him to go.

H.J. cupped her face. "Hermione, right now you're feeling vulnerable and I don't want to take advantage of you."

Hermione started to chew her lip in a motion she'd never realized was almost identical to Mione's whenever she got upset or nervous. "I understand."

H.J. felt Hermione's withdraw. "I'm not sure you do. I really like you, Hermione, and there's nothing I'd like to do more right now than stay and hold you but I know that you're not ready for what I want."

Hermione was stunned. "But you can't like me like that."

"I do like you like that." H.J. assured her.

"But I've got bushy hair, I'm frightened of everything, and I..." Hermione's words were cut off as H.J. leant forward and gently kissed her.

Hermione had never been kissed before, and tensed as she felt H.J.'s lips brush across her own. H.J. lifted his head. "Are you okay?"

Hermione nodded and closed her eyes as H.J. tilted his head to kiss her again. Uncertain of what she was doing, Hermione relaxed and let H.J. guide her. H.J. deliberately held back with the kiss, not wanting to alarm her. He knew that she had never had a boyfriend before, so he was also willing to bet that she'd never been kissed before either.

As H.J. raised his head to look at Hermione, she was staring at him like a deer caught in a car's headlights. "Now do you see why I didn't want to be alone with you?"

Hermione nodded almost numbly.

H.J. moved his hands from her face. "I'm going to make us both a cup of tea."

Hermione didn't want him to go but she knew that he was right. "I'm just going to go straight to bed."

Seeing how embarrassed she looked, H.J. stopped Hermione from leaving. "Hermione, I don't want you to feel uncomfortable around me. Would you prefer it if we just remained friends?"

Mistakenly thinking that that was what H.J. really wanted, Hermione nodded. "I think it might be best. Goodnight."

"Goodnight." H.J. watched Hermione almost run out of the room.

H.J. sighed as he sat down heavily on the bed and thought about Hermione. He didn't know she'd done it, but somehow she'd managed to get past the barrier he'd erected around his heart. He hadn't even realized how he'd felt until he'd gone ice-skating with her and Cammie during the Easter holidays. She'd come skating over to where he'd been standing, her eyes sparkling as she laughed at something Cammie had said. He'd wanted to do nothing more than drag her down onto the cold surface and kiss her until she couldn't breathe. Instead he'd been horribly short with both Hermione and Cammie for the rest of the day.

As he lay back on the bed, H.J. knew that he should have realized how he'd begun to feel about Hermione long before Easter when he'd started making excuses after Christmas to join Harry, Xander and Hermione in the Room every weekend. At the time he'd merely told himself that it was just to keep Xander company. Forced to face the truth, H.J. finally admitted to himself that Xander had had nothing to do with it and he'd only spent time there because Hermione had been there. As he thought about Hermione's obvious relief at his offer just to be friends and the way she'd fled from his bedroom, H.J. convinced himself that he'd blown it with Hermione and that she wasn't interested in him in a romantic sense. Miserably reaching up to switch off the bedroom light, H.J. swore out loud before rolling over and trying to get some sleep.

In her bedroom, Hermione cried quietly into her pillow before dropping off into an uneasy slumber.

June 7th 2003

Harry and H.J. decided to spend the afternoon in Hogsmeade. Harry was still feeling a little down that things hadn't worked out between him and Mione, and H.J. had refused to take no for an answer. Smiling at Rosmerta, H.J. ordered two Dragon Ales. "Cheer up, for goodness sake. You can't mope over Mione forever."

"I'm just fine." Harry's face said otherwise.

"Harry, you're just going to have to face the fact that she's happy with him." H.J. was getting slightly fed up with Harry's melancholia.

"I have, H.J." Harry ran his hand through his hair. "It's hard to ignore when she spends every spare minute with the guy. Even Remus is griping about it."

H.J. took a mouthful of the Dragon Ale that Rosmerta had just served. "I wouldn't exactly call it griping, Harry. Remus just pointed out that he missed having her at his beck and call last weekend."

Harry sipped at his own ale before putting it down. "Do you think Mione's in love with Seville?"

"Truthfully?" H.J. asked hesitantly before continuing when Harry nodded. "Yes, I do." He grinned a little ruefully. "I think my daughter is as well. He seems to be all she talks about."

"That's only because he took her up in that damn plane of his." Harry had grown to hate the word plane.

"You're forgetting about the swimming pool, Harry." H.J. couldn't resist teasing him.

"You're right, I did." Harry said scathingly before scanning the pub. "Nym."

H.J. looked over at the bar. "I wonder what she's doing in here."

Harry shrugged. "No idea."

"Why don't you go over and offer to buy her a drink?" H.J. suggested.

Harry put down his beer. "I might just do that." Harry had liked Nymphadora Shacklebolt immensely but he knew from Cassandra that the girl wasn't married to the Auror in this world, and actually tended to keep away from the wizarding world in general.

Tonks sensed someone coming up behind her and span round. "Hello."

"Hi." Harry smiled. "I was wondering if I could buy you a drink."

Tonks thought that this was the librarian she'd heard about from Rosmerta and Cassandra but hadn't yet met. "You're Harry Sebastian, aren't you?"

Harry was taken aback. "How did you know?"

"There aren't too many men in here that fit the description." She glanced over to the table Harry had just come from. "I take it that's H.J."

"Yes." Harry confirmed. "So getting back to my original question, can I buy you a drink?"

Tonks decided that Harry could. "I'll have a Dragon Ale."

Harry turned and smiled at Rosmerta. "Would you mind pouring the lady a Dragon Ale?"

Rosmerta smiled just as happily back at Harry. "I'd be delighted to, Harry. I'll bring it over."

Harry held out his arm to Tonks who took it. "Come and meet H.J."

H.J. stood up as the two of them came over, and held out his hand. "Hi. I'm H.J. Sebastian."

"Tonks." Hating her first name, Tonks had no intention of revealing it to the two men.

"That's an unusual name." H.J. hid his amusement as he knew how much the Tonks he'd known had hated her first name.

"And the only one I'm giving you." Tonks took her drink from Rosmerta. "So tell me, how are you finding working at Hogwarts?"

"I'm enjoying it." Harry didn't really want to reveal how he really felt. "Did you attend?"

"Yes but I hated it." Tonks admitted.

Harry was surprised she was so open about her feelings, particularly as she didn't really know them. "I'm sorry to hear that."

"It's not your fault I had a rough time there." In her usual impetuous manner, Tonks had decided that she liked the look of Harry and H.J., and wanted to see how they'd react when she told them about her parentage. "My Dad's a Muggleborn."

"No wonder you didn't like Hogwarts." Harry sympathized.

"If it hadn't been for Charlie Weasley, my time there would have been hell." Tonks would be forever grateful to the redheaded boy who'd ignored his friends' entreaties to ignore her. "Even though I'm considered a half-blood, too many of the children knew that my Dad was a Muggleborn. I was tolerated but apart from Charlie, I had no-one."

H.J. was a little surprised to hear that Tonks had had a bad time. "My adopted daughter Cammie has a Muggle parent and she's accepted well enough."

"I heard about her parents mistreating her." Even though Tonks lived within the Muggle world, she still kept firm links to the wizarding world. "She's been accepted because people felt sorry for her and were outraged at what had happened to her. Also you've now adopted her, and you're a pureblood. Her former parents are obviously out of the picture, and as such she's considered your daughter now."

Harry shook his head in disbelief. "So just because your Dad didn't mistreat you and no-one felt sorry for you, you had a rough time of it?"

"It doesn't matter now." Tonks shrugged. "I got through it. Just be glad that H.J.'s daughter won't have to go through the same thing."

"I am." H.J. knew that he wouldn't have tolerated anyone mistreating Cammie. "But I wish there was something I could do."

"You could buy the school yourself and change things." Tonks gave a guffaw at the thought, and went to slap H.J. across the back. Instead, she slipped and sent the entire contents of his beer mug over Harry's lap. "One day I'll be graceful, I swear I will." Tonks pulled her wand out to clean up the mess but Harry had beaten her to it.

"I've got it." Harry didn't quite trust Tonks to clean him up. "You were joking about buying the school, weren't you?"

"Of course. I doubt Albus would ever sell it." Tonks waved at Rosmerta. "Can you get H.J. another beer? I knocked his over Harry."

Rosmerta was used to Tonks' clumsiness. "No problem."

Harry frowned. "Dumbledore owns Hogwarts?"

"Didn't you know?" Tonks took a mouthful of her own beer. "He changed the law when he became Minister so that he could purchase it from the Ministry. It's because of him that Muggleborns are accepted there at all."

Harry was surprised. "But why even let them attend? They're not exactly treated well."

Tonks looked around before answering. "Before Muggleborns attended Hogwarts they were tracked down and their magic simply stripped from them. Albus changed that; it's now up to the individual. He at least wanted to give them the choice."

"It's a pity he hasn't done more to help them once they arrived." Harry still didn't know what he thought about the Minister of Magic.

Tonks looked around again. "I wouldn't air your opinions too freely in here, Harry."

Seeing that the discussion was making Tonks uncomfortable, H.J. decided to change the subject. "So tell me Tonks, are you and Charlie a couple?"

Tonks burst out laughing. "Me and Charlie? Are you joking?"

"No." H.J. couldn't see what was so funny. "So fill me in."

"Charlie's a good friend but everyone jokes he's wed to his dragons." Tonks thought a lot of Charlie but had never felt that way about him. "Why are you so interested in whether we're dating?"

H.J. hadn't expected her to be so forward. Not daring to look at Harry he told her. "I'm not. I'm asking for my single brother here."

Harry scowled at H.J. "So says the other single guy at the table."

Tonks put a stop to any argument with a question. "So, Harry, where do you fancy going?"

"I beg your pardon." Harry couldn't believe that Tonks had said that.

"I'm asking you out on a date, Harry." Tonks grinned.

"I thought women were supposed to be shy and retiring." Harry observed.

"Only if they're married." Tonks pulled a face. "I think it's ridiculous. Playing second fiddle to a man isn't my cup of tea. It wasn't Mum's either which is why she married Dad who thinks that pureblood wedding vows are a load of crap."

"Is that why every time I've seen Lily Snape, she barely says anything in Severus' presence?" Lily had only really talked to Harry when Severus wasn't anywhere to be seen.

"She's the perfect example of what a pureblood's wife should be; fawning, dependent and deferent to her husband." Tonks grinned. "Something I'm never going to be."

Harry laughed. "Are you always this open and friendly?"

Tonks was honest. "If I like you, then yes, and I like you. So where do you fancy going?" She glanced over at H.J. "You're welcome to come along as well."

"You know what they say about three being a crowd." H.J. picked up his fresh beer and stood up. "I'll see you later, Harry."

"Okay." Even though he'd found it easy dating before he'd married Seville, Harry suddenly felt a little nervous and very much out of practice.

"I don't bite." Tonks smirked. "Not unless you ask to me anyway. So any suggestions as to where we can go?"

Harry knew he could have made quite a smart comment about biting but kept it to himself. "I don't really know anywhere decent. You pick somewhere."

"Do you mind going to a Muggle bar?" Tonks stood up.

Harry shook his head. "No."

"Come on then." Tonks led Harry outside and apparated them both away.

The Next Morning

Harry groaned and rolled over, only to come into contact with a warm body. "My head."

Tonks handed over a hangover potion. "I've already taken mine."

"What the hell was I drinking last night?" Harry felt better as he drank the potion. He knew it must have been something strong as his metabolism usually saved him from hangovers.

"B52s." Tonks loved the drink. "But I don't usually mix them with Surfers on Acid. I have to admit that I'm impressed though. I haven't seen many people who can drink like you."

As his pain abated, Harry realized he was naked. "This is going to sound awful but did we...?"

"Nah." Tonks peeked under the sheet. "But if you'd like to..."

"Not right now." Harry felt terribly self-conscious. "Bathroom?"

Tonks just laughed. "Through that door."

Spotting his trousers on the floor, Harry twisted out of the bed and pulled them on before heading in the direction of the bathroom. Turning back round to look at Tonks, he opened the door. "Do you mind if I take a shower?"

"Go ahead." Tonks winked. "I might even join you."

Harry had the feeling that she wasn't joking. After quickly using the facilities, he set the shower running before transfiguring a pebble from a container that Tonks had on the side into a toothbrush. Finding toothpaste in the cabinet, Harry brushed his teeth, before shedding his trousers and getting into the shower. Just as he'd stepped into it, the door opened and Tonks walked into the room.

She smiled at him as she brushed her teeth. "I have two bathrooms but only one has a shower. Do you mind if I join you?"

Harry had never met anyone quite like this version of Tonks. Not only was she funny and open but she was also sexually aggressive in a way he'd rarely come across before. "I won't be long."

Tonks shook her head. "Not quite how I envisaged this going. I'll be blunt. I want you, Harry. I'm not looking for hearts and roses though. So if you're not interested, then just say so."

Harry was a little shocked but responded by simply holding out a hand. Tonks smiled and dropped her bathrobe before stepping into the shower to join Harry.

Several hours later Harry found himself sitting in bed with Tonks eating burger and chips. "I can't believe I'm eating something this messy in bed."

Tonks didn't care where she was eating it. "If you drop anything, it'll wash out."

Harry decided that if Tonks wasn't bothered, then neither was he. "So what are you doing for the rest of the day?"

"I planned to spend it in bed with you." Tonks dipped her chips into her tomato ketchup before popping them into her mouth. "Ouch, they were hot."

Harry almost choked on his burger at Tonks' initial comment. "You didn't want to go out anywhere?"

"We just went out to buy these." Tonks pointed out. "And we only went out because I thought you needed some food to keep up your energy."

As Harry watched Tonks' tongue flick out to lick the ketchup that was nestled in the corner of her mouth, all interest in his food went out of the window, and he vanished the remains of his meal. "I think my energy is most definitely up. Get rid of that."

Tonks gave Harry a salacious smile before vanishing the remnants of her own food. "Well, if you insist."

"I do." Harry dragged a laughing Tonks under him and he lost himself in making love to her.

Later that Night

H.J. looked up from the book he was reading as Harry walked into the room. "Where the hell have you been?"

Harry couldn't believe H.J. had needed to ask. "Where do you think I've been?"

"I know I wanted you to cheer you but this is ridiculous." H.J. frowned at Harry's neck. "I suggest you cover that up before classes tomorrow."

Harry conjured up a mirror. "Oops."

"I really don't need to ask what you were doing, do I?" H.J. knew that he sounded like a parent but he'd been worried when Harry hadn't come back.

Harry could hear the disapproval in H.J.'s tone. "No, H.J. you don't, and you know what, I refuse to feel guilty about it. As you so charmingly pointed out to me yesterday, it's time I faced up to the fact that Mione's with someone else and has no intention of getting back with me, so why the hell shouldn't I enjoy Tonks' company?"

"I don't mean to sound judgmental, Harry." H.J. sighed. "I was just worried about you. I honestly thought you'd go out for a few drinks with her and come back home."

Harry calmed down at H.J.'s admission. "I like her H.J. She's fun and she's made it perfectly clear that she's not looking for anything more than that. Right now that's just what I need."

"She sounds a little like you used to be." Harry had told H.J. about his behavior before he'd married Seville.

"I think she is." Harry admitted. "But as I said, it's all good with me."

"So what does the Tonks of this world like?" H.J. grinned. "Apart from sex, that is."

Harry gave H.J. the finger and helped himself to a glass of wine. "Kids."

H.J. gave Harry a quizzical look. "I thought she was just out for fun, not wanting to bear your children."

"Very funny, H.J. She's a Muggle nursery school teacher." Harry had been shocked when Tonks had told him what she did. "I just can't imagine Tonks doing that but she said she loves it."

"So what was she doing in Hogsmeade?" H.J. grabbed Harry's glass of wine. "Get yourself another one."

Harry poured out yet another glass of wine. "She was there to see Rosmerta. Apparently they've been friends ever since Tonks was at school."

"Odd kind of friendship." H.J. pointed out.

"It takes all sorts." Harry yawned. "I think I'm going to take this to bed."

H.J. sniggered. "Worn the big bad wolf out, has she?"

Harry decided that the question didn't dignify an answer and instead shut his bedroom door on H.J.'s smirking face.

Next Chapter: Sirius learns the truth about Harry; Cassandra's world falls apart; Faith receives life changing news.

Chapter 15: Moving On

Tuesday, 22nd April 2003

At 7 o'clock Harry felt the familiar tug of a portkey as the coin activated and he found himself standing in a large, ornately decorated room. A man in a gold mask was sitting in front of a fireplace with two white masked men flanking him on either side. Harry noted that one of the masks had an embossed snake on it. The gold-masked man got up. "It's very nice to meet you, Harry."

"I'm afraid you have me at a disadvantage." Harry held out his hand.

The man shook it. "Dominus."

Harry rode through the waves of pain that emanated from touching the man's hand. "I'm pleased to meet you."

"Even though you've been told the gist of why you're here, you don't really know what I expect from you, do you?" Dominus held out a hand towards a seat. "Please sit down."

Harry was a little taken aback at the hospitality; he'd expected to stand. "Thank you, and you're right, I don't."

Dominus seated himself again. "As Aditi told you, we are part of a group who disagrees with Muggleborns being allowed to live in our world. However, as it's been less than ten years since Voldemort was defeated, people are still a little reticent about expressing their opinions too openly against Muggleborns."

Harry disagreed. "I've noticed schoolchildren aren't quite so reluctant."

Dominus smiled behind his mask. "That's because they don't really know any better as most of them can't remember what it was like when Voldemort was trying to take over."

"You might be right." Harry knew he was. "So why ask me to join? I'm not exactly rich, powerful or connected."

"Because we need to monitor the treatment of Muggleborns in a school environment, and you work in Hogwarts." Dominus answered smoothly. "I need to get a case together for banning them from the school; show the wizarding world that it is for the benefit of Muggleborns that we revert to the old laws. You can help me do that."

Harry didn't believe that that was all Dominus wanted but acted as if he did. "That's all?"

"Yes. I don't expect you to do any dark and insidious deeds for me." Dominus had no intention of telling Harry that eventually that that was exactly what he'd expect from the young man sitting in front of him. "Just keep an eye on how the Muggleborns are treated by the other students. If they're attacked; if they're made to feel welcome; that sort of thing."

Harry pretended to consider what Dominus had said. "You do know I can't be seen to be discriminating against Mudbloods don't you?"

Dominus smirked to himself as Harry reverted to the more unsavory description of Muggleborns. "Which is why I'm merely asking you to monitor them. You certainly have a head start with one of them living in your house. She should be a fount of knowledge as to what it's like to be a Mudblood in Hogwarts."

Harry knew Aditi had to have told him about Hermione. "I have to be honest and say that I'm surprised you approached me at all knowing that Granger lives with us."

"From what I've been told you're not exactly enamored of having the Mudblood live in your home." Dominus further confirmed Harry's suspicion that Aditi had filled the man in on the entirety of their conversation.

"I'm not." Harry lied. "But as I also told Aditi, the house doesn't belong to me, but to my brother."

“Why did he even ask her to live there at all?” Dominus had been puzzled by H.J.’s actions.

Harry wished he could see the man’s face. He was used to gauging people by their expressions. “Because he found out that she was being beaten by her parents for being magical.”

Dominus scowled behind his mask. “That sheds a different light on the matter then. Akin to your brother, I don’t believe someone should be punished for their abilities. However, I wouldn’t go so far as to house a Mudblood. I would have simply killed the parents.”

Harry felt a cold shiver go down his spine as he thought about the Dursleys. “H.J. might have taken Granger in but I don't think he's willing to commit murder for her.”

“I understand.” Dominus stood up. “Harry, I’m afraid I’m going to have to cut this meeting short as I have another appointment to attend to, but before I leave I need to know if you’re interested. If you are, then we can set up another meeting to talk in more detail.”

“And if I’m not?” Harry decided to see how far the man he was fairly sure was Voldemort was willing to go.

“You’ll simply be obliviated.” Dominus pulled out his wand. “So, Harry, what’s it to be?”

May 10th 2003 - Hogwarts

H.J. opened the door to find Sirius standing outside. “Sirius, come in.”

Sirius followed H.J. inside. “I’m sorry H.J. but I need to know where you were last night.”

“I was holding a detention with Ron Weasley until ten. After that I came back here.” H.J. indicated that Sirius should sit down. “What’s going on?”

“Hermione Granger’s parents were found murdered in their dental practice. They were discovered this morning by their dental nurse.” Sirius shuddered as he remembered the bloody scene he’d been called to. “Obviously the Muggle police were involved but as their daughter is magical, we were alerted as well.”

H.J. frowned. “Talk about déjà vu; first the Dursleys, and now the Grangers. So before you ask, Harry spent the evening with Xander Harris in Hogsmeade. I expect Rosmerta could testify to their being there. They both arrived back here just after I got back and we spent a couple of hours playing cards, after which Xander crashed here. I should have gone to Hogsmeade as well last night but Snape assigned Weasley’s detention to me. So none of us are responsible unless you think Cammie or Hermione herself did it.”

Sirius pulled a face at the mention of Snape's name. “No, I don’t.”

“What happened to the Grangers then?” H.J. poured out a glass of red wine. “Would you like one?”

Sirius had had a rough day. “I would, thank you.” Sirius took a mouthful before answering H.J.’s first question. “They were tortured with their own dental instruments. We think that whoever killed them made sure they couldn’t scream aloud by cutting out their tongues first.”

H.J. found that he wasn’t particularly bothered. “Do you suspect someone magical?”

“No but as with the Dursleys I needed to question everyone connected to Hermione Granger.” Sirius had checked and no trace of any magical activity had been found in the room. “They were tied up using pantyhose and a necktie before being tortured and left to bleed to death.”

“It still could have been magical.” H.J. observed.

“Entry was gained through a side door. Whoever did it smashed a window and unlocked the door by reaching in through the broken

window according to the Muggle police.” Sirius had double-checked everything. “So unlike the Dursleys this wasn’t done by a wizard. They would have just apparated in.”

H.J. sighed. “I can’t say I really care that they’re dead. Has Hermione been told yet?”

“Yes. I told her a couple of hours ago.” Sirius took another mouthful of wine. “She didn’t even cry. After I’d finished telling her, she simply excused herself and tried to leave the room. Poppy thinks she’s in shock. She’s going to keep her in the hospital ward overnight.”

“I’ll drop by and see her.” H.J. thought that Hermione would probably be feeling awful once the shock started to wear off. “How much detail did you go into?”

“I just told her that it was apparently an attempted robbery that had gone wrong.” Sirius finished off his wine. “We’re keeping the details out of the Muggle press.”

“Thanks.” H.J. stood up. “You don’t have to go. You can help yourself to another glass of wine if you want to.”

“I’d better not.” Sirius shook H.J.’s hand. “I want to drop by and see if my daughter’s still up before I go. I’ve approved her application to the Auror Corps.”

H.J. knew Cassandra would be ecstatic. The two men left H.J.’s rooms, H.J. heading up to the hospital ward and Sirius heading off to see Cassandra. Poppy came out as she heard the door open. “I know no-one can be outside flying this late at night and you don’t look sick, so what can I do for you, H.J.?”

H.J. smiled. “I’m actually here to see Hermione Granger.”

Unaware that Hermione was now living in H.J.’s house, Poppy couldn’t hide her surprise that H.J. even knew the Muggleborn. “She’s in the private room at the end on the left. I’ve tried to give her some calming potion but she keeps on protesting she’s fine.”

H.J. knocked on the door and put his head around it. Hermione put down her book and smiled as she saw him. "H.J."

"Hermione, I'm so sorry about your parents." H.J. could see that Sirius was right; Hermione didn't look as if she'd shed a single tear.

"Thanks but I'm not that upset about it." Hermione sat back down. "It's ridiculous Madam Pomfrey insists on keeping me in here."

"You're not sad that they're dead?" H.J. sat down on the bed.

"I don't feel anything to be truthful." Hermione looked up at H.J. "They were just two people whose house I once shared."

H.J. thought that she was still obviously in shock as Poppy thought. "Do you want me to stay with you? I'm not planning on doing anything for the rest of the night."

"You don't have to pander to me, H.J. I'm fine." Hermione picked up her book. "I have some reading that I need to get done for next week."

"If you need me, you know where I am." H.J. got up and headed out before stopping at Poppy's office. "Poppy, if she becomes upset, don't hesitate to let me know."

"I will." Poppy promised.

However, Hermione got through the night without needing calming potions or H.J.

One week later

H.J. put his arm around Hermione as they stood at the gravesides. He whispered softly to her. "Are you alright?"

Hermione looked almost dazed. "Fine."

H.J. knew then that it was finally sinking in. "Lean on me."

Hermione watched as first her stepfather's, and then her mother's coffin were lowered into the graves. "Why didn't she love me, H.J.?"

"I don't know, Hermione." H.J. could feel little tremors starting to wrack Hermione's body.

As the Minister ended the service, Hermione stepped forward and threw the requisite handful of dirt onto each of the coffins before stepping back and letting H.J. hold her again.

H.J. was aware of the sympathetic glances that Hermione was receiving. "We just have to get through this afternoon, Hermione."

Hermione felt like an automaton as she smiled as she received people's commiserations. Eventually, however, there was just her and H.J. left. She tried to smile at H.J. and failed. "I, err, I.."

H.J. held out his arms and Hermione went into them, burying her face in his chest as she finally broke down and cried. "Just let it all out."

Hermione stood and cried all over H.J.'s white shirt before lifting her head. "I'm sorry you had to waste your day here with me."

H.J. gently pushed her hair out of her eyes. "I wasn't going to leave you to go through this alone. Harry wanted to be here as well but he couldn't get the day off as Remus is away, and with his transformation tonight we didn't think it would be a good idea."

"I know. He came and saw me yesterday afternoon." Hermione let H.J. rub soothing circles over her back as she hid her face once more. "Are you going back to Hogwarts tonight?"

H.J. could only just about understand what Hermione was saying as she didn't lift her head to ask her question. "No. I'm going to stay here with you."

"I don't want to stay in this house." Hermione still didn't look up.

At her words, H.J. simply apparated them to his house and into her bedroom. "Why don't you go get showered and get into bed?"

Hermione shook her head and kept her face tucked into his chest. "I just want to be held."

H.J. looked at Hermione's small bed and apparated them both into his own room, before disentangling Hermione from him and lying down the bed. "Come and lie down."

Hermione didn't need asking twice. "Why didn't she love me, H.J.?" Hermione asked the same question she'd asked at the graveside.

"Because she couldn't see what a wonderful daughter she'd got." H.J. had an answer for her this time. "It was her loss."

"She'll never love me now." Hermione glanced up at H.J., tears streaming down her face. "Am I so awful?"

"Don't ever think that!" H.J. used his free hand to stroke Hermione's cheek. "You are not awful."

"I must be; she never wanted me." Hermione sniffled. "I did everything I could when I was growing up to try and gain her approval but nothing ever worked. She made me feel like nothing."

H.J. stroked her hair. "You are not nothing, Hermione. My daughter thinks the world of you." H.J. waited for Hermione to look at him again before finishing what he wanted to say. "Just know that you're not alone in this world. Cammie cares for you, as do Harry and I."

Hermione noticed that he didn't add Mione. "I don't think Mione is ever going to like me."

"She was just jealous of your and Harry's friendship." H.J. told Hermione what he'd told Harry months earlier.

“But I’ve never once thought of Harry like that.” Hermione wasn’t exactly surprised but she’d never once had feelings for Harry that weren’t above board.

“I know.” H.J. continued to stroke her hair. “Anyway, it doesn’t matter now. Mione’s with someone new.”

“And she still doesn’t like me.” Hermione gave a tremulous smile. “But you’re right it doesn’t matter.”

“Hey.” H.J. cupped her face. “I care about you. I hope that counts for something.”

“Really?” Hermione asked needing the reassurance.

“Really.” H.J. placed a soft kiss on her cheek. “And I’m here for you.”

Hermione felt her heart miss a beat at H.J.’s touch. “I don’t know what I would have done without you today.”

H.J. gave a smile. “What else are friends for?”

“Thank you.” Hermione then leant forward and went to place a kiss on H.J.’s cheek, just as he turned his head meaning that their lips connected instead.

As he felt Mione’s lips brush against his own, H.J. immediately became aware of how closely Hermione was molded to his body, which was beginning to react to her closeness. “I think I’d better move.”

Not realizing H.J.’s problem, Hermione frowned. “H.J.?”

H.J. knew that Hermione hadn’t worked it out. “Hermione, if I don’t move, things are going to get very embarrassing very quickly.”

Hermione suddenly realized what H.J. meant and became flustered. “I’m sorry; I didn’t mean to do anything.”

H.J. sighed. "Hermione, calm down."

As H.J. went to pull away, Hermione grabbed his arm. "Please don't leave me alone."

H.J. hesitated. "Hermione, I really don't think it's a good idea if I stay here any longer."

"Please." Hermione didn't want him to go.

H.J. cupped her face. "Hermione, right now you're feeling vulnerable and I don't want to take advantage of you."

Hermione started to chew her lip in a motion she'd never realized was almost identical to Mione's whenever she got upset or nervous. "I understand."

H.J. felt Hermione's withdraw. "I'm not sure you do. I really like you, Hermione, and there's nothing I'd like to do more right now than stay and hold you but I know that you're not ready for what I want."

Hermione was stunned. "But you can't like me like that."

"I do like you like that." H.J. assured her.

"But I've got bushy hair, I'm frightened of everything, and I..." Hermione's words were cut off as H.J. leant forward and gently kissed her.

Hermione had never been kissed before, and tensed as she felt H.J.'s lips brush across her own. H.J. lifted his head. "Are you okay?"

Hermione nodded and closed her eyes as H.J. tilted his head to kiss her again. Uncertain of what she was doing, Hermione relaxed and let H.J. guide her. H.J. deliberately held back with the kiss, not wanting to alarm her. He knew that she had never had a boyfriend before, so he was also willing to bet that she'd never been kissed before either.

As H.J. raised his head to look at Hermione, she was staring at him like a deer caught in a car's headlights. "Now do you see why I didn't want to be alone with you?"

Hermione nodded almost numbly.

H.J. moved his hands from her face. "I'm going to make us both a cup of tea."

Hermione didn't want him to go but she knew that he was right. "I'm just going to go straight to bed."

Seeing how embarrassed she looked, H.J. stopped Hermione from leaving. "Hermione, I don't want you to feel uncomfortable around me. Would you prefer it if we just remained friends?"

Mistakenly thinking that that was what H.J. really wanted, Hermione nodded. "I think it might be best. Goodnight."

"Goodnight." H.J. watched Hermione almost run out of the room.

H.J. sighed as he sat down heavily on the bed and thought about Hermione. He didn't know she'd done it, but somehow she'd managed to get past the barrier he'd erected around his heart. He hadn't even realized how he'd felt until he'd gone ice-skating with her and Cammie during the Easter holidays. She'd come skating over to where he'd been standing, her eyes sparkling as she laughed at something Cammie had said. He'd wanted to do nothing more than drag her down onto the cold surface and kiss her until she couldn't breathe. Instead he'd been horribly short with both Hermione and Cammie for the rest of the day.

As he lay back on the bed, H.J. knew that he should have realized how he'd begun to feel about Hermione long before Easter when he'd started making excuses after Christmas to join Harry, Xander and Hermione in the Room every weekend. At the time he'd merely told himself that it was just to keep Xander company. Forced to face the truth, H.J. finally admitted to himself that Xander had had nothing to do with it and he'd only spent time there because Hermione had been

there. As he thought about Hermione's obvious relief at his offer just to be friends and the way she'd fled from his bedroom, H.J. convinced himself that he'd blown it with Hermione and that she wasn't interested in him in a romantic sense. Miserably reaching up to switch off the bedroom light, H.J. swore out loud before rolling over and trying to get some sleep.

In her bedroom, Hermione cried quietly into her pillow before dropping off into an uneasy slumber.

June 7th 2003

Harry and H.J. decided to spend the afternoon in Hogsmeade. Harry was still feeling a little down that things hadn't worked out between him and Mione, and H.J. had refused to take no for an answer. Smiling at Rosmerta, H.J. ordered two Dragon Ales. "Cheer up, for goodness sake. You can't mope over Mione forever."

"I'm just fine." Harry's face said otherwise.

"Harry, you're just going to have to face the fact that she's happy with him." H.J. was getting slightly fed up with Harry's melancholia.

"I have, H.J." Harry ran his hand through his hair. "It's hard to ignore when she spends every spare minute with the guy. Even Remus is griping about it."

H.J. took a mouthful of the Dragon Ale that Rosmerta had just served. "I wouldn't exactly call it griping, Harry. Remus just pointed out that he missed having her at his beck and call last weekend."

Harry sipped at his own ale before putting it down. "Do you think Mione's in love with Seville?"

"Truthfully?" H.J. asked hesitantly before continuing when Harry nodded. "Yes, I do." He grinned a little ruefully. "I think my daughter is as well. He seems to be all she talks about."

“That’s only because he took her up in that damn plane of his.” Harry had grown to hate the word plane.

“You’re forgetting about the swimming pool, Harry.” H.J. couldn’t resist teasing him.

“You’re right, I did.” Harry said scathingly before scanning the pub. “Nym.”

H.J. looked over at the bar. “I wonder what she’s doing in here.”

Harry shrugged. “No idea.”

“Why don’t you go over and offer to buy her a drink?” H.J. suggested.

Harry put down his beer. “I might just do that.” Harry had liked Nymphadora Shacklebolt immensely but he knew from Cassandra that the girl wasn’t married to the Auror in this world, and actually tended to keep away from the wizarding world in general.

Tonks sensed someone coming up behind her and spun round. “Hello.”

“Hi.” Harry smiled. “I was wondering if I could buy you a drink.”

Tonks thought that this was the librarian she’d heard about from Rosmerta and Cassandra but hadn’t yet met. “You’re Harry Sebastian, aren’t you?”

Harry was taken aback. “How did you know?”

“There aren’t too many men in here that fit the description.” She glanced over to the table Harry had just come from. “I take it that’s H.J.”

“Yes.” Harry confirmed. “So getting back to my original question, can I buy you a drink?”

Tonks decided that Harry could. "I'll have a Dragon Ale."

Harry turned and smiled at Rosmerta. "Would you mind pouring the lady a Dragon Ale?"

Rosmerta smiled just as happily back at Harry. "I'd be delighted to, Harry. I'll bring it over."

Harry held out his arm to Tonks who took it. "Come and meet H.J."

H.J. stood up as the two of them came over, and held out his hand. "Hi. I'm H.J. Sebastian."

"Tonks." Hating her first name, Tonks had no intention of revealing it to the two men.

"That's an unusual name." H.J. hid his amusement as he knew how much the Tonks he'd known had hated her first name.

"And the only one I'm giving you." Tonks took her drink from Rosmerta. "So tell me, how are you finding working at Hogwarts?"

"I'm enjoying it." Harry didn't really want to reveal how he really felt. "Did you attend?"

"Yes but I hated it." Tonks admitted.

Harry was surprised she was so open about her feelings, particularly as she didn't really know them. "I'm sorry to hear that."

"It's not your fault I had a rough time there." In her usual impetuous manner, Tonks had decided that she liked the look of Harry and H.J., and wanted to see how they'd react when she told them about her parentage. "My Dad's a Muggleborn."

"No wonder you didn't like Hogwarts." Harry sympathized.

"If it hadn't been for Charlie Weasley, my time there would have been hell." Tonks would be forever grateful to the redheaded boy

who'd ignored his friends' entreaties to ignore her. "Even though I'm considered a half-blood, too many of the children knew that my Dad was a Muggleborn. I was tolerated but apart from Charlie, I had no-one."

H.J. was a little surprised to hear that Tonks had had a bad time. "My adopted daughter Cammie has a Muggle parent and she's accepted well enough."

"I heard about her parents mistreating her." Even though Tonks lived within the Muggle world, she still kept firm links to the wizarding world. "She's been accepted because people felt sorry for her and were outraged at what had happened to her. Also you've now adopted her, and you're a pureblood. Her former parents are obviously out of the picture, and as such she's considered your daughter now."

Harry shook his head in disbelief. "So just because your Dad didn't mistreat you and no-one felt sorry for you, you had a rough time of it?"

"It doesn't matter now." Tonks shrugged. "I got through it. Just be glad that H.J.'s daughter won't have to go through the same thing."

"I am." H.J. knew that he wouldn't have tolerated anyone mistreating Cammie. "But I wish there was something I could do."

"You could buy the school yourself and change things." Tonks gave a guffaw at the thought, and went to slap H.J. across the back. Instead, she slipped and sent the entire contents of his beer mug over Harry's lap. "One day I'll be graceful, I swear I will." Tonks pulled her wand out to clean up the mess but Harry had beaten her to it.

"I've got it." Harry didn't quite trust Tonks to clean him up. "You were joking about buying the school, weren't you?"

"Of course. I doubt Albus would ever sell it." Tonks waved at Rosmerta. "Can you get H.J. another beer? I knocked his over Harry."

Rosmerta was used to Tonks' clumsiness. "No problem."

Harry frowned. "Dumbledore owns Hogwarts?"

"Didn't you know?" Tonks took a mouthful of her own beer. "He changed the law when he became Minister so that he could purchase it from the Ministry. It's because of him that Muggleborns are accepted there at all."

Harry was surprised. "But why even let them attend? They're not exactly treated well."

Tonks looked around before answering. "Before Muggleborns attended Hogwarts they were tracked down and their magic simply stripped from them. Albus changed that; it's now up to the individual. He at least wanted to give them the choice."

"It's a pity he hasn't done more to help them once they arrived." Harry still didn't know what he thought about the Minister of Magic.

Tonks looked around again. "I wouldn't air your opinions too freely in here, Harry."

Seeing that the discussion was making Tonks uncomfortable, H.J. decided to change the subject. "So tell me Tonks, are you and Charlie a couple?"

Tonks burst out laughing. "Me and Charlie? Are you joking?"

"No." H.J. couldn't see what was so funny. "So fill me in."

"Charlie's a good friend but everyone jokes he's wed to his dragons." Tonks thought a lot of Charlie but had never felt that way about him. "Why are you so interested in whether we're dating?"

H.J. hadn't expected her to be so forward. Not daring to look at Harry he told her. "I'm not. I'm asking for my single brother here."

Harry scowled at H.J. "So says the other single guy at the table."

Tonks put a stop to any argument with a question. "So, Harry, where do you fancy going?"

"I beg your pardon." Harry couldn't believe that Tonks had said that.

"I'm asking you out on a date, Harry." Tonks grinned.

"I thought women were supposed to be shy and retiring." Harry observed.

"Only if they're married." Tonks pulled a face. "I think it's ridiculous. Playing second fiddle to a man isn't my cup of tea. It wasn't Mum's either which is why she married Dad who thinks that pureblood wedding vows are a load of crap."

"Is that why every time I've seen Lily Snape, she barely says anything in Severus' presence?" Lily had only really talked to Harry when Severus wasn't anywhere to be seen.

"She's the perfect example of what a pureblood's wife should be; fawning, dependent and deferent to her husband." Tonks grinned. "Something I'm never going to be."

Harry laughed. "Are you always this open and friendly?"

Tonks was honest. "If I like you, then yes, and I like you. So where do you fancy going?" She glanced over at H.J. "You're welcome to come along as well."

"You know what they say about three being a crowd." H.J. picked up his fresh beer and stood up. "I'll see you later, Harry."

"Okay." Even though he'd found it easy dating before he'd married Seville, Harry suddenly felt a little nervous and very much out of practice.

“I don’t bite.” Tonks smirked. “Not unless you ask to me anyway. So any suggestions as to where we can go?”

Harry knew he could have made quite a smart comment about biting but kept it to himself. “I don’t really know anywhere decent. You pick somewhere.”

“Do you mind going to a Muggle bar?” Tonks stood up.

Harry shook his head. “No.”

“Come on then.” Tonks led Harry outside and apparated them both away.

The Next Morning

Harry groaned and rolled over, only to come into contact with a warm body. “My head.”

Tonks handed over a hangover potion. “I’ve already taken mine.”

“What the hell was I drinking last night?” Harry felt better as he drank the potion. He knew it must have been something strong as his metabolism usually saved him from hangovers.

“B52s.” Tonks loved the drink. “But I don’t usually mix them with Surfers on Acid. I have to admit that I’m impressed though. I haven’t seen many people who can drink like you.”

As his pain abated, Harry realized he was naked. “This is going to sound awful but did we...?”

“Nah.” Tonks peeked under the sheet. “But if you’d like to...”

“Not right now.” Harry felt terribly self-conscious. "Bathroom?"

Tonks just laughed. “Through that door.”

Spotting his trousers on the floor, Harry twisted out of the bed and pulled them on before heading in the direction of the bathroom. Turning back round to look at Tonks, he opened the door. "Do you mind if I take a shower?"

"Go ahead." Tonks winked. "I might even join you."

Harry had the feeling that she wasn't joking. After quickly using the facilities, he set the shower running before transfiguring a pebble from a container that Tonks had on the side into a toothbrush. Finding toothpaste in the cabinet, Harry brushed his teeth, before shedding his trousers and getting into the shower. Just as he'd stepped into it, the door opened and Tonks walked into the room.

She smiled at him as she brushed her teeth. "I have two bathrooms but only one has a shower. Do you mind if I join you?"

Harry had never met anyone quite like this version of Tonks. Not only was she funny and open but she was also sexually aggressive in a way he'd rarely come across before. "I won't be long."

Tonks shook her head. "Not quite how I envisaged this going. I'll be blunt. I want you, Harry. I'm not looking for hearts and roses though. So if you're not interested, then just say so."

Harry was a little shocked but responded by simply holding out a hand. Tonks smiled and dropped her bathrobe before stepping into the shower to join Harry.

Several hours later Harry found himself sitting in bed with Tonks eating burger and chips. "I can't believe I'm eating something this messy in bed."

Tonks didn't care where she was eating it. "If you drop anything, it'll wash out."

Harry decided that if Tonks wasn't bothered, then neither was he. "So what are you doing for the rest of the day?"

“I planned to spend it in bed with you.” Tonks dipped her chips into her tomato ketchup before popping them into her mouth. “Ouch, they were hot.”

Harry almost choked on his burger at Tonks’ initial comment. “You didn’t want to go out anywhere?”

“We just went out to buy these.” Tonks pointed out. “And we only went out because I thought you needed some food to keep up your energy.”

As Harry watched Tonks’ tongue flick out to lick the ketchup that was nestled in the corner of her mouth, all interest in his food went out of the window, and he vanished the remains of his meal. “I think my energy is most definitely up. Get rid of that.”

Tonks gave Harry a salacious smile before vanishing the remnants of her own food. “Well, if you insist.”

“I do.” Harry dragged a laughing Tonks under him and he lost himself in making love to her.

Later that Night

H.J. looked up from the book he was reading as Harry walked into the room. “Where the hell have you been?”

Harry couldn’t believe H.J. had needed to ask. “Where do you think I’ve been?”

“I know I wanted you to cheer you but this is ridiculous.” H.J. frowned at Harry’s neck. “I suggest you cover that up before classes tomorrow.”

Harry conjured up a mirror. “Oops.”

"I really don't need to ask what you were doing, do I?" H.J. knew that he sounded like a parent but he'd been worried when Harry hadn't come back.

Harry could hear the disapproval in H.J.'s tone. "No, H.J. you don't, and you know what, I refuse to feel guilty about it. As you so charmingly pointed out to me yesterday, it's time I faced up to the fact that Mione's with someone else and has no intention of getting back with me, so why the hell shouldn't I enjoy Tonks' company?"

"I don't mean to sound judgmental, Harry." H.J. sighed. "I was just worried about you. I honestly thought you'd go out for a few drinks with her and come back home."

Harry calmed down at H.J.'s admission. "I like her H.J. She's fun and she's made it perfectly clear that she's not looking for anything more than that. Right now that's just what I need."

"She sounds a little like you used to be." Harry had told H.J. about his behavior before he'd married Seville.

"I think she is." Harry admitted. "But as I said, it's all good with me."

"So what does the Tonks of this world like?" H.J. grinned. "Apart from sex, that is."

Harry gave H.J. the finger and helped himself to a glass of wine. "Kids."

H.J. gave Harry a quizzical look. "I thought she was just out for fun, not wanting to bear your children."

"Very funny, H.J. She's a Muggle nursery school teacher." Harry had been shocked when Tonks had told him what she did. "I just can't imagine Tonks doing that but she said she loves it."

"So what was she doing in Hogsmeade?" H.J. grabbed Harry's glass of wine. "Get yourself another one."

Harry poured out yet another glass of wine. "She was there to see Rosmerta. Apparently they've been friends ever since Tonks was at school."

"Odd kind of friendship." H.J. pointed out.

"It takes all sorts." Harry yawned. "I think I'm going to take this to bed."

H.J. sniggered. "Worn the big bad wolf out, has she?"

Harry decided that the question didn't dignify an answer and instead shut his bedroom door on H.J.'s smirking face.

Next Chapter: Sirius learns the truth about Harry; Cassandra's world falls apart; Faith receives life changing news.

Chapter 16: Life and Death

11th June 2003

Sirius sat with his head in his hands, only looking up when he felt a soft hand touch his neck. "Faith, I thought it was Craig."

"How is she?" Faith sat down and took Sirius' hand.

"It's doubtful she's going to survive." Sirius dragged his free hand over his face. "Craig's been in there for almost five hours now."

"I'm sorry but I only got Remus' message about an hour ago, and I had to wait for him to come and get me." Faith apologized for not getting there sooner.

"I didn't expect you to come at all. It's the middle of the night." Sirius pulled his hand free and put it around Faith's shoulders so that he could hold her.

Faith put her arm across Sirius' waist and hugged him. "I should be with you. How's Albus doing?"

"He's going to be fine. Bella took the brunt of the attack, and we think that Fawkes took a hit for Albus as he's reverted to his fledgling state." Sirius didn't mention that only a killing curse could do that to the loyal phoenix.

"How bad are Bella's injuries?" Faith knew only that her husband's cousin had been badly hurt.

"She took at least two Reductos to her chest and abdomen. She's also got numerous broken bones and Craig thinks she hit her head on Albus' desk as she fell." Sirius rubbed his red-rimmed eyes. "It's my fault; she shouldn't have even been there."

"What happened?" Faith encouraged Sirius to talk about it.

Sirius took comfort from the feeling of his wife tucked against his body, and explained. "I'd received a message from Remus saying

that Harry really needed to see me about something so Bella told me to go, and that she'd take the papers to Albus that needed signing for the approval of the new trainees for this year. I left but I'd barely said hello to Remus when my ring started vibrating, and I had to go straight back to the Ministry."

"So you don't know what Harry wanted?" Faith wondered what it was.

"Not a clue." Since his back was aching, Sirius released Faith and sat up, going back to simply holding her hand. "I hurried back to the Ministry to find Albus' office a bloody mess and Healers trying to stabilize Bella so that they could move her. Albus had already been taken to St. Mungo's. Fawkes was lucky no-one had trodden on him as he was lying on the floor at the side of the desk."

"How did they get into Albus' office?" Faith continued questioning Sirius.

Sirius began to explain to Faith the basics of how security at the Ministry worked. "That late in the evening the Ministry usually only has a skeleton staff but even so there are still numerous wards to get through to reach Albus' office. They come into operation once the Ministry closes at night, so unless you can apparate site to site as Bella and I can, you need an invitation or clearance to be there. We think that whoever attacked Albus either had a warding expert with them or were one themselves, or that they had a high enough clearance to bypass the wards. We checked Albus' schedule and there was no mention of any meetings. I think someone had clearance since to be able to portkey or apparate out, as they must have done once the alarms went off, would take clearance of the highest level."

Faith frowned. "So you don't have any idea who did it then?"

Sirius had checked the office and hallway for magical signatures but whoever had been behind the attack had successfully masked them. "I don't, as everyone with that level of clearance has been checked and ruled out. The only person who hasn't been checked is Bella, and we know it couldn't have been her."

Faith thought Sirius looked terrible. "I spotted a sign for a cafeteria on my way in. Why don't I see if I can get you a cup of coffee? Unless I need magic to get it of course."

"I'm afraid you do." Sirius stood up. "Stay here; I'll go."

Faith ignored Sirius' command and stood up as well, only to sway on her feet. "Sirius, I don't feel so well."

Sirius turned just as Faith was sick. "Shit." He hurried over to his wife and put his arm around her waist. "Faith?"

"Not..." Faith didn't get any further as she pulled away and was sick again.

Sirius promptly swung her up in his arms and started to hurry down the corridor, concern for his wife upmost in mind. "Excuse me."

A nurse that had just come onto the corridor stopped, and immediately sized up the situation. "Take her into Room 430 and I'll send someone straight along."

Trainee Healer Thespian walked into Room 430 to find Faith being sick into a bowl as Sirius held her before carefully wiping her face with a damp towel. "Lord Black, I'm Crispin Thespian."

Sirius turned around. "Can you take a look at my wife? This is the fourth time she's been sick in five minutes."

Crispin could hear worry lacing Sirius voice as he ran his wand over Faith. After a quick check, he smiled at the couple. "Your wife is perfectly healthy, Lord Black."

Sirius scowled. "She's being sick. I don't call that healthy. Check her again."

Crispin waved his wand over Faith's abdomen and a small blue cloud appeared. "She's not sick, she's pregnant. Judging by the size of the indicator, I'd say about nine weeks' along."

Sirius froze in the action of wiping Faith's face, and he tersely asked a question. "What does the blue mean?"

"It means that it's a boy." Crispin beamed brightly at Sirius. "Congratulations to you both." Crispin passed a vial to Faith. "Take this."

Sirius went still before suddenly dropping the towel and bolting into the bathroom, imitating his wife as he violently threw up. Faith, who'd knocked back the vial's contents just as Sirius bolted, sat up. "Sirius?"

Crispin clucked his tongue. "Sympathetic type is he?"

"No." Feeling better, Faith got up off the bed and walked into the bathroom to find Sirius sitting on the floor shaking. "Sirius?" When he didn't respond, Faith turned to Crispin. "What's wrong with him?"

Crispin ran his wand over Sirius. "His blood pressure is elevated as is his heart rate. I think he's gone into shock. The good news must have been a little too much for him." Crispin beamed as he walked over to a cupboard before unlocking it and taking out a potion. After kneeling down by Sirius, he offered it over. "Drink this."

Sirius ignored Crispin, so Faith took the vial from him and opened it up. Touching Sirius' face, she looked at him. "Drink this, Sirius."

Sirius did as his wife instructed, his color starting to return after a few moments, and he soon found his voice again. "Can you check her again?"

"I can assure you..." Crispin's pomposity came to a sudden end as an angry Sirius grabbed the man by his jacket, pulling him closer so that Sirius' face was barely an inch away from the healer's own.

"Check Her Again." Each word came out in a slow but angry staccato tone.

"Of course." Crispin hurried to wave his wand over Faith, once more resulting in the same small blue cloud appearing above Faith's abdomen. "There's no mistake."

"Oh Merlin no." Sirius buried his face in his knees.

Faith was now starting to get scared. "Sirius, please talk to me."

Crispin decided that discretion was the better part of valor and made his excuses. "I'll leave you two alone. You probably need to talk about this."

Faith was shocked to see Sirius had tears in his eyes when he looked up at her. "Sirius, you're scaring me."

Sirius touched Faith's face. "I'm so sorry, Faith."

Now scared almost witless, Faith grabbed his shirt. "Sirius, just tell me what the fuck is going on."

Sirius swallowed hard. "Do you remember me telling you about Orion's mother?"

"She died in childbirth." Faith let out her breath in a relieved whoosh as she realized what was bothering Sirius. "Sirius, just because Eleanor died, doesn't mean I will. Come on, get up off the floor."

Sirius got up and lifted Faith off her feet before carrying her over to the bed. "I need to tell you something."

Faith let Sirius carry her even though she was entirely capable of walking herself. "Sit down as well then; I can still feel you shaking."

Sirius held Faith's hand as he sat down. "That night I told you about the pureblood wedding vows, do you remember it?"

Faith grinned. "It's hard to forget the night your husband proposes to you before whisking you off in the middle of the night to wake up the Minister of Magic to marry you, so I'd say yes."

"And do you remember the vows you made?" Sirius asked.

"Of course." Faith was now confused. "What's your point, Sirius?"

Sirius looked into Faith's face. "When I swore to you I'd never invoke our wedding vows I think I may have made a mistake."

Faith scowled. "There were three vows, right?"

"Right." Sirius confirmed. "Obeying me, serving me, and basically vowing to give up your life in order to defend me if it comes down to it."

"So which one do you regret not invoking?" Faith's voice had become hard. "And you'd better not even hint that it's the last one."

"The first one." Sirius knew that the final vow would be the one he'd be least likely to invoke.

Faith still wasn't impressed. "You told me that you wanted our marriage to be between two equals; that you didn't want an obedient wife who doesn't speak unless you tell her she can, or who walks two feet behind you like some sort of servant."

"I don't want that." Sirius protested. "It's just that..."

Faith interrupted him. "It's just that what, Sirius? I was willing to accept that there is no divorce between two purebloods, and that my status as a Slayer elevates me to that position, but you know very well I'd never have married you if I thought for one moment you'd have invoked the vows."

"I know that, which is one of the reasons I didn't do it. You mean more to me than some archaic vows." Sirius assured his wife.

"Then why do you wish you'd invoked the vow to obey you?" Faith by now had angrily pulled her hand free from Sirius' own.

"Because of Eleanor." Sirius mentioned his first wife for the second time that night.

Faith didn't understand, and the irritation in her tone reflected that. "What about Eleanor?"

Sirius stood up, and began to pace nervously around the room. "When I married Eleanor, I was young and stupid, and being a pureblood, I was brought up to believe that a wife should be subservient to her husband. I therefore invoked the vows when I married her."

Faith was disgusted. "That's terrible Sirius. How could you do that someone you're supposed to love?"

"I didn't love her when we married. Ours was an arranged marriage but I did grow to love her as time went by." After his own experience, Sirius knew he wasn't going to force the same sort of marriage on his own children. "And as the marriage progressed, I began to hate how she followed me around like a docile puppy, and I revoked the vows. But by then it was too late and she still continued to defer to me in the same manner."

Faith shook her head. "Why would she do that?"

"Like me, Eleanor had been brought up by a strict pureblood family, and it had been drilled into her since she was a child that that was what her husband expected." Sirius gave a sigh. "I'm not even sure if I hadn't invoked the vows at all whether she would have still behaved in the same manner or not."

"Didn't she ever stand up to you?" Faith couldn't imagine being that submissive.

Sirius gave a bitter laugh. "Just once. When I asked her to abort Orion."

Faith's hand flew to her mouth. "You asked her to abort your son?"

Sirius could see that Faith was horrified by what he'd just told her, and he hurried to continue with his explanation. "We found out early on in the pregnancy that Orion was slowly draining Eleanor's magic in order to survive, and we were given the rare option of terminating the pregnancy."

"Rare option?" Faith couldn't see why it was rare.

"In the wizarding world it's a crime to abort a child." Sirius could still remember the sinking feeling when Craig had given him and Eleanor the option. "However, in a situation like ours, it's permissible."

"She wouldn't even consider it, would she?" Faith knew that her own mother wouldn't have hesitated if she'd had the opportunity to get rid of Faith.

"No." Sirius had pleaded time and time again with Eleanor to reconsider. "I told Eleanor that we could try for another baby but she was adamant. It was only afterwards that I found out that she wanted to provide me with an heir. She told Craig in confidence, and said that he could tell me afterwards but refused to let him tell me before then, as she knew what I'd do. She told him she loved me too much to let everything I'd worked for disappear."

Faith thought about Sirius' daughter. "But what about Cassandra?"

"The Black inheritance passes through the male line. Everything would have gone to my brother Regulus or his son after my death, and Eleanor didn't want that to happen. The Black family has always been wealthy but I invested wisely and quadrupled the value of our holdings within the first few years of our marriage." Sirius knew that Eleanor had been right in her suspicions as to what he'd have done if Eleanor had told him her reasons for not aborting Orion. "If I'd known why she was doing it, I would have simply just signed everything over to Regulus there and then in order to save her. The money meant nothing to me."

"So she sacrificed herself for you and her son." Faith wished her own mother had felt even an ounce of the love for her that Eleanor had appeared to have harbored for her child and husband.

"After she died, I don't know what I would have done without James and Remus." Sirius had wanted to die along with his wife. "Remus took care of both Cassandra and Orion for the first few weeks. James took me home with him and cared for me while I tried to drink myself to death."

Faith was glad he'd failed. "You obviously didn't succeed though."

"James would let me drink so much before stunning me, sobering me up and putting me to bed." Sirius didn't know how James had put up with him. "I was so vile to him. I actually tried to kill myself one night but James took my wand away before I could complete the spell."

"Angel did the same for me." Faith answered sympathetically. "But I only thought I wanted to die."

"I truly did want to. James told Remus what I'd try to do." Sirius had been beyond angry when James told him what he'd done. "I was drunk when James told me that he'd done that and I ended up hitting James. He just stood there and let me." Sirius still felt ashamed when he remembered how badly he'd hurt his friend. "Afterwards he told me that Remus was going to be bringing Orion over. I told him if he did that then they were no longer my friends and no longer welcome in my home."

"You couldn't face Orion, could you?" Faith understood a little of how Sirius felt. It was how she had felt about facing the truth about herself before Angel had helped her get back on her feet.

"I hated him." Sirius admitted. "I blamed him for Eleanor's death."

Faith could see that it was hurting Sirius to tell her that. "How old was he when you first saw him?"

"I was there when he was born but I was totally focused on Eleanor." Sirius had stayed with his wife's body for hours before James had finally convinced him to leave. "Back then I wouldn't have cared if Orion had died that day."

Faith got up and wrapped her arms around Sirius. "So how did you get over your feelings towards him?"

"James of course ignored my threat, and made sure I couldn't leave his house, before telling Remus to come over." Sirius had refused to leave the bedroom he was staying in. "I wasn't given much choice

about seeing Remus and Orion as James simply overrode the wards I'd placed around my bedroom and they were able to walk in. James petrified me allowing Remus to place Orion into my arms. I hated my son but I couldn't let a baby fall and they knew me well enough to know that."

"I think they still took a chance." Faith wasn't sure if she'd have been confident enough to do the same.

"Both of them had their wands out and would have stopped Orion from hitting the ground if I'd dropped him. I wanted nothing more than to give him back but Remus and James refused to accept him. I couldn't even place him on the bed as James only released the spell from my waist upwards." Sirius had implored the two men to take Orion back. "Remus told me that Eleanor wouldn't have wanted this, and that she didn't sacrifice herself just for me to reject Orion, and that I should just look at my son."

"Did it work?" Faith waited nervously for Sirius' response.

"No." Sirius gave a wry smile. "Remus' words, while true, had no impact on me. It was Orion himself who made the difference."

"Don't tell me, he opened his baby blues and you were lost." Faith guessed.

"Actually the little blighter peed all over me; Remus wasn't exactly great at putting diapers on." Sirius gave a small but sad laugh. "Orion then started crying. He was so small and unable to do anything for himself so I couldn't just leave him like that. James handed me my wand and told me to go home. Realizing that neither he nor Remus were going to help me, I did as he said and took Orion home to the room that Eleanor had had decorated for him, and changed him before picking him up again. Within minutes he'd fallen asleep in my arms, obviously trusting me to do the right thing. It was at that moment that I realized that I'd do anything for my son. I then put him in his crib and spent the rest of the day bawling my eyes out at what a bastard I'd been before going to collect Cassandra from Remus."

Faith reached up to kiss Sirius on the cheek. "I'm so sorry you had to go through that, Sirius."

Sirius coughed and wiped his eyes. "I expect you think I'm a terrible person for treating Orion like that, don't you?"

Faith didn't but she knew that was how Sirius viewed himself. "I'm not going to tell you that you did the right thing, but I will say that it was probably the right thing for you. You still feel guilty for rejecting Orion after Eleanor died for him, don't you?"

"I think I'll always feel guilty." Sirius admitted. "And I can't go through that again."

"You won't have to." Faith touched Sirius' face, and wiped away the tears that were still falling.

"You don't understand, Faith." Sirius couldn't stop the tears. "It's because it was a son that the baby killed Eleanor. It's not the same with daughters."

Faith still wasn't worried. "But I'm not magical, Sirius."

"But your strength is derived from a magical source." Sirius pointed out.

"You don't know that the baby will affect me in the same way." Faith's voice started to shake as she answered him.

"No, I don't but I don't want to take the chance." Sirius cupped Faith's face. "I want you to abort the baby."

Faith was stunned. "Sirius, it's been a long night and we don't have to think about this now."

A voice came from the doorway behind them. "Actually I'm afraid if Sirius' fears are right, then you do."

Sirius looked up to see Craig standing there, blood staining his white jacket. "Bella?"

"She's holding in there." Craig answered in a tired voice. "So I'm hopeful."

"I'm sorry, Craig. It should have been me. She was doing me a favor." Sirius apologized to his friend.

"You couldn't have known, Sirius." Craig sat down. "Bella's always accepted the dangers that go with the job, even though I wish it was different."

"If there's anything either of you need, it doesn't matter what it costs, just tell me." Sirius knew that Craig was wealthy enough to take care of Bella himself but he still wanted him to know that he'd do anything for either of them.

"Well, I am going to propose to her when she wakes up." Craig smiled weakly as he tried to ignore the fact that she still might not make it. "And this time I'm not taking no for answer, so I may be in need of a best man."

"Gladly." Sirius hoped that Bella would finally say yes, as she'd refused every one of Craig's marriage proposals over the last ten years, choosing to live with him but still retaining her single status.

"Crispin told me about the baby, Sirius." Craig's face became grave. "He wasn't aware of your history. I'll take a look at Faith myself now."

Faith let Sirius lead her to the bed and she lay back down. "Please give me good news, Craig."

"I'll do my best." Craig said reassuringly as he ran his wand over Faith's abdomen. However, his face told the story as he finished the scan.

Sirius didn't wait for Craig to tell him what he already knew, and he dropped down onto the floor, his legs refusing to hold him up any longer. "It's the same isn't it?"

Craig nodded. "The baby is definitely a Filius Superstes baby. I am so very sorry."

"What does that mean?" Faith asked in a small voice.

"That if you choose to go on with the pregnancy, the baby will kill you." Craig hated being so blunt but he wanted Faith to understand the ramifications of continuing with it.

"She's not having it." Sirius snapped.

"It's not your choice, Sirius." Craig said quietly. "Only the mother can make that decision."

Faith was reeling. "Are you sure it's affecting me?"

Craig knew how strong Faith usually was. "Try lifting me."

Faith got up before turning white as she tried and failed. "I'm going to die?"

"No, you're not." Sirius got up and sat on the bed next to his wife, tears starting to run down his cheeks again as he begged her as he had done with Eleanor. "Faith, please do this for me. I loved Eleanor and it nearly killed me to lose her, and I love you more than I ever loved her." Not waiting for Faith's response, Sirius looked up at Craig. "When can it be done?"

"If Faith wants it, then right now. The quicker it's done the better it is for the mother." Craig told him. "But it has to be Faith's decision, not yours."

Sirius turned to Faith, his tears falling faster than ever. "Please, Faith."

Faith thought about the baby, and then thought about what Sirius had just told her, before nodding at Craig. "Okay."

"Are you sure you don't want some time to think about this, Faith?" Craig asked softly. "This is a big decision."

"Just do it." Faith wanted it over and done with.

Craig turned to Sirius. "You can hold her hand once I've put her to sleep."

Sirius kissed Faith. "I'll be right here."

Faith tried to smile and failed. "I love you."

"I love you too." Sirius kissed his wife once more before letting go of her.

Craig told Faith to lie back. "You won't feel a thing. I'm going to put you to sleep and when you wake up, it will all be over."

Faith started to cry as she lay back. "Okay."

"Are you ready?" Craig squeezed Faith's hand before releasing it to take his wand out.

"Yes." Faith watched as Craig raised his wand.

"Dorm..." Craig didn't get any further as Faith lashed out, sending the wand flying across the room.

Sirius stood up. "Faith?"

Faith began to cry even harder. "I can't do it, Sirius. I'm sorry but I can't do it."

Sirius didn't say anything and, not looking at Faith, walked silently out of the room.

Craig took the crying girl into his arms. "It's okay, Faith. He'll be back. He's just upset right now."

Faith sobbed into Craig's jacket, ignoring the blood that still stained it. Craig let go of Faith with one hand and reached into his jacket for a

calming potion before helping her to take it. "Are you sure you won't change your mind?"

Trembling Faith shook her head. "I thought I could do it for Sirius but I can't kill my baby."

"You do know that you'll die if you don't abort it?" Craig asked softly.

Now that she was calmer, Faith explained her reasoning. "I've done some terrible things Craig, and I can't add killing my baby to that list, even if it means sacrificing myself and hurting Sirius. Ever since I found out I was a Slayer I've always expected to die at a young age. At least this way I'm going to die for something worthwhile, and not at the hands of some faceless and soulless monster."

"Sirius isn't going to understand that." Craig remembered how terrible it had been for his friend as he'd had to sit back and watch Eleanor slowly get weaker and weaker. "So you're going to have to be patient with him." Craig got up. "I'm going to keep you in for the rest of tonight, just to make sure that everything is alright."

"But..." Faith wanted to go and look for Sirius.

"I'm going to find him." Craig knew what she wanted. "Now try and get some sleep."

Craig checked in on Bella to find that her vitals had improved somewhat. "Sarah, if anything happens I'm wearing my ring. I have to go help someone."

"I'll take good care of her, Sir." Sarah promised.

Craig made his way out to the apparition zone and apparated to Sirius' house. As he'd suspected he would, he found Sirius slumped in a corner of his study, papers everywhere and a half empty bottle of scotch open at his side. "Sirius, drinking isn't the answer to your problems."

"Ask me if I give a flying fuck." Sirius picked up the bottle and took another mouthful out of it. "Why doesn't she love me as much as I love her, Craig?"

"She does, Sirius." Craig vanished the broken glass that littered the floor before sitting down beside his friend.

"Then why is she going to leave me?" Sirius asked brokenly.

Craig sighed. "Faith told me she'd done some terrible things and she couldn't add killing her baby to the list even if meant sacrificing her own life. What has she done that's so bad?"

"She killed a man and tried to blame it on a fellow slayer." Sirius answered honestly. "She then fell in with the wrong crowd, ultimately betraying the people who'd tried to befriend her."

"Shit, Sirius." Craig was shocked.

"There's more but you don't really need to hear about it." Sirius drank some more of the scotch. "She was so prickly when I first met her. She tried to get me to believe she was only interested in sleeping with me so I made her wait for months before I slept with her. That was the same night I asked her to marry me. I couldn't believe it when she said yes."

"I'm surprised you even considered dating her knowing what you do about her." Craig was as honest with Sirius as Sirius had been with him.

"She didn't mean to kill the man; it was an accident, and things just spiraled out of control from that point. Eventually everything came to a head, and since then she's done everything she can to make up for what she did, Craig." Sirius laughed bitterly. "I think giving her life for our son is going to be her final act of penance."

"I'm sorry." Craig took the bottle from Sirius and took a mouthful from it.

"It's not your fault." Sirius dropped his head into his hands. "I don't know how this happened. I was so careful about using contraceptive charms."

"They're not always infallible. It's rare but sometimes they just fail." Craig knew that it extremely rare however and the chances of failure were almost nil.

"So I'm just lucky I guess." Sirius swallowed hard and wiped his face before standing up. "Where is she?"

"I've kept her in." Craig laid a hand on Sirius' shoulder.

"I don't know if I can watch her die, Craig." Sirius' voice was harsh as he struggled with his tears again. "I just don't."

"You don't have any choice, Sirius." Craig hated being so blunt with his friend. "As time goes by, she's going to get weaker and weaker, and more emotionally dependent on you. She's going to need you more than ever."

"I'm not a fucking idiot. I know exactly how much she's going to need me. It's not exactly something you forget when you've already gone through it once before." Sirius snarled, before visibly deflating as he remembered who he was talking to. "I'm sorry, Craig. I shouldn't be taking this out on you. You almost lost Bella tonight and you wouldn't have even had the chance to say goodbye, would you?"

"That's true but it still doesn't make it any easier for you, Sirius." Craig pulled his friend to him, briefly hugging him. "If you want Faith, she's still in the same room."

"Thank you." Sirius then apparated straight out of his study.

Faith glanced over as the door opened and Sirius walked in. Sirius walked over in silence and lay down beside Faith, before pulling her into his arms as she broke down. "I'm so sorry I left you."

"I'm sorry I couldn't do it." Faith sobbed. "But I can't kill it, not even for you."

"I know." Sirius just about got the words out before he too started to cry again.

As he walked by the room he'd left Faith in, Craig put up silencing charms and locked the door before making sure a 'Do Not Enter' sign was prominently displayed.

Four weeks later

Harry waited nervously for Sirius to arrive. "Do you really think he'll be able to do it?"

"Well, we certainly can't." Remus reminded Harry.

Sirius appeared a few moments later. "Hi."

Wanting to get on with it, Harry handed over a piece of parchment. "Read this."

Sirius unfolded the parchment.

'Harry,

If you can't remember writing this, then you've been obliviated.'

Sirius glanced up. "Whose handwriting is this?"

"It's definitely mine." Harry confirmed. "But I don't remember writing it."

"When did you find it?" Sirius handed the parchment back.

"Towards the end of May." Harry admitted. "Remus has searched my mind but he can't find anything. He said that because of the position you hold, you're an expert in mind arts."

"And you waited until now to ask for my help?" Sirius asked.

"It was what I wanted to talk to you about last month but with the attack on Minister Dumbledore, you had to leave." Harry reminded him.

"Sorry, I forgot." Sirius didn't want to think about that night. "Okay then. Sit down and try to relax." After waiting for Harry to sit down, Sirius withdrew his wand. "Legilimens." Sirius eventually found the block and carefully began to unweave it. After twenty minutes, and beginning to think he'd never manage it, Sirius tugged the last thread holding the block together and Harry's memory bloomed into life. Sirius watched it before withdrawing. "Whoever this Dominus is he didn't want anyone finding that obliterated memory. I almost couldn't find it and I knew I was looking for it, so I want answers and I want them now."

Remus and Harry exchanged glances. Harry knew it was up to him. "I wrote that note just before the portkey operated to take me to meet Dominus."

"Why would you even consider it?" Sirius hadn't pegged Harry as someone who felt so strongly about the Muggleborn issue.

"That's a long story." Harry got up. "I think we should sit down."

An abbreviated explanation later, Sirius' face was almost incandescent with rage. "My children swore oaths to keep your secrets?"

Remus answered for Harry. "Cassandra, Luna and Katherine did as have I, but Harry refused to let the others swear one."

"When I found out what taking an oath entails here, I couldn't let them go through that sort of pain." Harry explained.

"So why didn't you stop Cassandra from taking an oath?" Sirius snarled.

"I was petrified at the time." Harry hurriedly explained about the basilisk, but only succeeded in angering Sirius more.

"So not only did Cassandra swear an oath, but she went into a hidden chamber in Hogwarts where she knew there was a basilisk?" Sirius was shaking with rage.

"Yes." Harry admitted.

"Do not go anywhere." Sirius ordered. "I will be back shortly."

Harry turned worriedly to Remus as Sirius stalked out of his room. "Will the children be alright?"

"I've rarely Sirius this angry but don't worry, he won't hurt his children." Remus assured Harry.

"I hope you're right." Harry was still concerned despite Remus' words.

Sirius marched up to Cassandra's suite and knocked. Cassandra opened the door. "Dad?"

Sirius took Cassandra's arm and marched her over to the sofa. "Sit down. Where's Orion?"

Cassandra was scared by the severe look on Sirius' face. "What's going on, Dad?"

"I asked you a question." Sirius snapped at his daughter. "Where is your brother?"

Cassandra winced. "In the bedroom."

Sirius marched over to the bedroom and flung open the door to find Katherine and Orion lying on Katherine's bed, kissing. Having put up a silencing charm, neither of them had heard Sirius coming in. Sirius dispersed the spell. "Orion Black, get up now."

Orion and Katherine jumped apart at the sound of Sirius' voice. "Dad?"

"Both of you, out there now." Sirius barked out. "Move."

The two children hurried out to find a nervous looking Cassandra sitting on the sofa. She looked up at Sirius. "What's this about?"

Sirius ignored the question and turned to his son. "Orion, when were you going to tell me exactly who Harry, H.J. and Mione were?"

All three children looked at each other in shock. Sirius scowled. "Orion Black, when I ask you a question, I expect an answer."

"Yes, Sir." Orion met Sirius' eyes. "I couldn't tell you."

"And why not?" Sirius didn't give him a chance to respond. "It's not like you swore an oath like your sister."

Cassandra felt her stomach drop. "Who told you?"

"Harry did." Sirius addressed Orion. "You're grounded for two weeks when you return home tomorrow."

"Yes, Sir." Orion didn't dare argue.

"Now go back to your tower." Sirius ordered before turning to Katherine. "I'm severely disappointed in you."

"Are you going to tell Mum and Dad?" Katherine asked in an unsteady voice.

"No." Sirius knew that it wasn't his secret to share and respected that fact. "But you will ask your parents if you can spend the first two weeks of the holiday at my house where you too will also be grounded for two weeks."

Katherine felt relief flood her that her parents wouldn't find out. "Yes, Uncle Sirius."

Sirius stared down at Cassandra. "You, like, Katherine know the dangers of swearing an oath. You could die if you slip up."

"I'm sorry." Cassandra tried to hold back the tears that were threatening to fall.

"I am most disappointed, however, that you risked your life to go into a chamber with a basilisk in it." Sirius let his displeasure with Cassandra show on his face. "Do you have any idea what it would have done to Orion and me if you'd died in there? No-one would have known, Cassandra. You'd have simply disappeared."

"I'm sorry." Cassandra repeated her comment but this time couldn't stop the tears from falling.

"Sorry doesn't even cut it." Sirius retorted. "I really don't need this right now, Cassandra. You're grounded for a month when you get back home."

"A month?" Cassandra gasped at the severity of the punishment.

"And I'm going to rescind your approval to join the Auror Corps." Sirius knew that this punishment would hit Cassandra the hardest.

Cassandra got to her feet. "You can't do that."

"I'm head of Auror Division, Cassandra. I can hire and I can fire." Sirius reminded her. "I need to know that I can fully trust every recruit I take on as well as every man and woman who works under me. You've shown me that I can't trust you."

Cassandra started to sob noisily. "It's not fair."

Sirius didn't want to hear it. "You should have thought about fair when you stupidly jeopardized your safety without giving your family a second thought."

"But I'm safe." Cassandra yelled at her Dad for the first time in her life. "It's not like I'm going to die now."

"But you could have done." Sirius barked out. "Don't you think I've already lost enough, without losing you too?"

Cassandra knew that Sirius meant her Mum. "But I'm safe, Dad. Nothing happened. You're not going to lose anyone."

Sirius shook his head. "You're wrong, Cassandra."

"Dad?" Cassandra forgot her own upset for a moment as she saw despair that filled Sirius' face.

"Faith's pregnant." Sirius said quietly, his anger spent.

Katherine silently left the room as Cassandra moved over to where Sirius was standing. "But that's good isn't it?"

"No, I'm afraid it's not." Sirius had never told Cassandra or Orion what had killed Eleanor; just that something had gone wrong during Orion's birth. "I should have told you before now but your Mum didn't just die in childbirth, Cassie. She chose to die."

Cassandra's hand flew to her mouth. "Oh Merlin."

"Orion was what was known as a Filius Superstes baby. In order for him to survive, he needed to drain your mother's magic and her life." Sirius couldn't look at Cassandra. "She could have terminated the pregnancy but chose not to."

Cassandra swallowed hard as the implications of what Sirius was saying began to sink in. "And the new baby?"

"Is the same, and Faith has decided to continue with the pregnancy." Sirius lifted his head up. "So you see, Cassandra, everything isn't alright."

"I'm really sorry, Dad." Cassandra reached out to touch Sirius' arm, only for him to back away.

"I'm sorry Cassandra but I can't afford to break down again." Sirius visibly straightened as he fought to get his emotions under control. "I'd prefer it if you didn't mention this Orion as I want to tell him myself."

"I won't." Cassandra felt almost numb inside. "I'm sorry if I let you down, Dad."

Sirius accepted Cassandra's apology as he knew it was heartfelt. "I know you are but your punishments will stand."

In the light of Sirius' own news, Cassandra knew that her disappointment didn't compare and she struggled to hold onto her tears. "Yes, Sir."

It wasn't until Sirius had turned and left the room that Katherine came back out, and held her friend as she broke down and cried again.

Next Chapter: An arrest is made; Harry receives an offer from a source he never expected; another murder takes place.

Chapter 17: Mutual Trust

A somber and somewhat calmer Sirius marched back to Harry's rooms to find him and Remus still waiting. "Harry, I'm going to need a copy of that memory."

"Of course." Harry agreed immediately. "Are Cassandra and Orion alright?"

As Harry and Remus' brief explanation had included Amicus, Sirius knew what was worrying Harry. "Harry I've never so much as smacked my children on the hand and I don't intend to start now."

Harry immediately expressed regret at asking the question at all. "I apologize. I don't know you that well, so I really shouldn't have assumed anything based on my own experience."

"Just so you know, Orion and Katherine have been grounded for two weeks. I won't be telling James or Lily why as it's not my secret to tell." Sirius sensed rather than saw, Harry relax. "As she should have known better, Cassandra has been grounded for a month and I've repealed her application to the Auror Corps."

Harry was horrified. "But it's her ambition. It's everything she's been working towards."

"I know that." Sirius admitted. "But as I told her, I can't trust her, and trust, as you should know, is the backbone of the entire Auror Division."

Harry knew that Sirius had a point. "Will you reconsider it next year?"

"Yes." Sirius could see that Harry was blaming himself. "I know it's a harsh lesson but I'd rather she learn it this way."

"I understand." Harry would probably have done something similar himself if it had involved one of his daughters.

Sirius turned to Remus. "Do you have any idea where I can find Aditi Nessa?"

Harry had filled Remus in on what Sirius had discovered in his memory. "She'll probably be at the London office or at home."

"Thank you." Sirius addressed Harry. "I'll need you to come with me."

The Ministry of Magic - Holding Cell

Several hours later, Aditi found herself sitting opposite Sirius Black and a cloaked man. "You've got no right to hold me. I'm a diplomat's daughter."

Sirius swiftly disabused her of her misconception that she couldn't be held. "I have every right to hold you. If what we believe is true, then you are guilty of treason, and your father has agreed to allow me and my colleague to question you."

"I don't believe you." Aditi couldn't believe that her father would willingly allow her to be questioned.

Sirius opened up the folder he'd brought into the room with him, and took out a piece of parchment which he showed to Aditi. "Do you recognize the seal?"

Aditi bowed her head as she recognized her father's seal on the order allowing her to be interviewed. "So I'm on my own."

The cloaked figure nodded. "As Dominus isn't going to come marching in to save you, I'd pretty much agree with that comment."

Aditi frowned at the mention of Dominus' name. "Dominus? I've never heard of him."

Sirius turned to the cloaked man. "Your opinion?"

"She's lying." The man said confidently. "Her heart rate spiked at the mention of his name."

Aditi looked at the cloaked figure. "Who are you?"

Sirius answered her. "That's absolutely none of your business. Now, Aditi, I think you should tell us everything you know."

Aditi shook her head. "I'm telling you nothing."

"If you don't tell us willingly, then you're going to be taken to Azkaban, Aditi." The cloaked figure hardened his voice. "And tomorrow we're going to tear your mind apart piece by tiny piece until we find what we're looking for."

"You'll find nothing." Aditi spat at the man. "And you will pay for daring to touch me."

The man simply wiped his hood with a handkerchief he withdrew from his pocket. "I doubt that very much." He leant forward. "We just need his real name. He won't ever have to know it came from you."

"Go to hell." Aditi turned her back on the two men.

Sirius tried another tack. "Where's your Dark Mark?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." Aditi acted as if she'd never heard of a Dark Mark.

The cloaked man answered Sirius' unasked question. "Another lie."

"Petrificus Totalus." After casting the spell, Sirius got up, walked over to the door and opened it before asking a female Auror to come inside. He then turned to the cloaked figure. "Where?"

The man told him. "I'd check her left arm first. If not, under her left breast, inside her eyelid or at the nape of her neck. If nothing turns up there, then a full body search will be necessary."

The two men turned their backs as the female Auror carefully searched Aditi. "Commander Black, I think I might have found something on the nape of her neck."

The two men both turned around and walked over to look at the tiny mark that lay nestled in Aditi's hairline. The cloaked man nodded. "That's it."

Sirius thanked the female Auror and threw up a privacy bubble around him and the cloaked man. "Harry, is it the same mark as your Voldemort used?"

Harry nodded. "Exactly. It's definitely his mark. And I'm convinced Aditi knows exactly who Dominus really is."

"We'll ship her off to Azkaban and hold her there until tomorrow. I need to be there when they try and break into her mind." Sirius hated to take such drastic measures but the charges levelled at Aditi meant that he could. "I'd have done it today, but as I've already explained, by law we need to give her twenty-four hours to change her mind and co-operate fully."

"I'd make sure she's kept in the area with the highest security clearance. If your Azkaban is anything like mine was, that would be the sixth basement level." Harry suggested.

"That's exactly where she is going." Sirius confirmed.

Before Sirius could drop the bubble, Harry had a question for him. "Your title is Commander?"

"Actually it's Commander-in-Chief." Sirius was curious. "Wasn't yours the same?"

Harry laughed. "No. In polite conversation it was just Head Auror Lupin but behind my back it was either Head Bastard or God, depending upon who you spoke to."

"God?" Sirius questioned. "Isn't that a Muggle worship thing?"

"It is when it's not being used in a derogatory sense." Knowing that Aditi's interview was over, Harry handed over the badge Sirius had given him authorizing Harry's participation in the interrogation and his

use of an Unspeakable's uniform. "I think you'd better have this back."

Sirius took it. "Have you ever thought about rejoining Auror Division?"

"Yes but I'm not sure I could deal with working my way back up from the bottom again." Harry laughed. "Not that I exactly had to work my way up too much last time."

Sirius was interested in what Harry had to say about his former experiences. "Let's deal with her, and then we'll go and get a drink."

Harry was a little surprised at Sirius' turnaround from earlier. "I'm surprised you're so open to all of this, let alone allowing me to sit on this interview."

"You swore an oath that the story you told me was the truth and with what you've told me, I can't see why anyone would bother to make up such a story." Sirius gave a rueful grin. "Add that to the fact that a one-armed man was intercepted in the Death Chamber seven years ago, and your story is rather convincing."

Harry frowned. "Seven years ago?"

"Let's get rid of her and then we'll talk." Sirius dropped the bubble.

Half an hour later Harry found himself sitting in Sirius' office with a large glass of scotch in his hand. "Your office is in exactly the same place as mine was."

"Does it look the same?" Sirius asked.

"Yes." Harry had been surprised how closely it resembled his own. Not really wanting to talk about his old office, he made a suggestion. "Actually instead of us sitting down and talking like this, would you like to see my memories and before you say anything, I do know that in this world pensieves are illegal."

"I think I can make an exception for a former head of Auror Division." Sirius himself owned a pensieve as it was part of his duties to review

memories of failed missions. "But before we do, I've a few things I'd like to discuss first. You seemed surprised when I said seven years ago."

"Voldemort was defeated on 1 May 1998 in my world. I left the same world on 4 May 2028, thirty years later. Here it's only been five years since 1998, yet according to your sighting of him, Voldemort must have arrived in 1996." Harry explained his confusion.

"You left in 2028, yet you still managed to arrive here in 2002, a mere six years after Voldemort arrived." Sirius contemplated what Harry had told him. "It must have something to do with how the portal works. You said when we were at Hogwarts that these Fates sent you here, so perhaps they determined exactly when you arrived. This is borne out by the fact that Mione and H.J. arrived on the very same day but by different means."

"You're probably right." Harry acknowledged. "Voldemort had two of the items he needed to use the portal so perhaps that affected his passage of time."

"So do you have any ideas or leads at all?" Sirius enquired. "After everything I've found out today as well as all the evidence, or lack of it, I'm willing to bet that Dominus or Voldemort, if he is the same guy, is behind the attack on Albus and Bella as well as Aditi."

"I'm sorry, I should have asked." Harry had forgotten about Bella. "How is your cousin doing now?"

Sirius answered the question happily. "She'll be back on duty in about a fortnight."

"Cassandra mentioned something about her getting married." Harry recalled a conversation he'd had with Sirius' daughter.

"Yes, to the family healer, Craig Delaney." Sirius smiled. "I presume you're already aware of who he is."

"My sister, Auri, used to work with him." Harry wondered how she was. "If he's anything like the Craig I knew, then he's a nice guy."

"He's a very nice guy." Sirius confirmed. "As well as a very good friend. I'm actually going to be his best man."

"A position I don't envy." Harry shuddered. "I hate making speeches."

"I'd have thought you'd have gotten used to making them by now." Sirius was a little surprised at Harry's comment.

"Used to them, yes. Like them, no." Harry laughed. "I think the only ones I truly enjoyed were the ones I used to give to the new recruits, and that's only because most of them were shaking in their boots at some of the things I used to torment them with."

Sirius laughed as well. "I know that feeling very well."

Harry remained on the subject of weddings. "So how is married life working out for you?"

Sirius' face immediately fell. "Not great I'm afraid."

"But you seemed really happy last month when you mentioned Faith." Harry remembered the cheeky grin Sirius had been wearing.

"I might as well tell you." Sirius took a very large mouthful of scotch. "Faith is carrying what is known as a Filius Superstes baby, and she's going to carry the baby to term."

"Shit, I'm sorry." Harry immediately commiserated with Sirius.

"You know the condition?" Sirius was surprised as not many people outside the medical profession did.

"My sister had the same problem." Harry shared his experience with Sirius. "Scarlett was, or should say that as far as I know still is, married to Draco Black."

"Black?" Sirius questioned Harry.

"Narcissa divorced Lucius and reverted to her original name before marrying Craig Delaney." Harry explained before continuing. "Everything was fine with their first two children, Devon and Cissie, but the third baby was a son. They were told that it would kill Scarlett if she continued with the pregnancy."

Sirius sucked in a breath. "What did they decide to do?"

"Aborted the baby." Harry could still remember how horrible it had been for the couple. "If it had been their first child, I doubt that Scarlett would have done it but she had her daughters to think about."

"Do they have any other children?" Sirius asked softly.

"Another daughter, Caroline." Harry did as Sirius had done and took a mouthful of his scotch. "But not before she miscarried another son."

"It would have had the same condition if she hadn't miscarried, wouldn't it?" Sirius felt sorry for the couple he'd never even met.

"Yes." Harry answered simply. "I'm aware I can't say I know exactly what you're going through as it wasn't me who had to make a decision as Scarlett and Draco did, but I do know what it's like to have to watch your wife fade away day by day and knowing you're powerless to do anything about it."

"You mean because of Mione's interference in the duel, don't you?" Sirius still found it hard to believe that she wasn't really alive. "I think I would have done the same as you if that helps any."

"Surprisingly, it does." Harry felt a measure of comfort from Sirius' words.

Sirius didn't want to dwell on the subject of Faith and the baby. "Getting back to leads. Do you have any idea at all who this Dominus might be?"

Harry shook his head. "Sadly no. I originally thought he was Thomas Seville but we've determined since then I can't be right."

Sirius put down his glass and got up. Moving to the wall, he tapped on it with his wand. "Expositus Sirius Black."

Harry watched with interest as Sirius cast several more spells, and eventually a folder appeared on Sirius' desk. "Same tricks I used."

"You can read it." Sirius sat back down.

Harry picked up the folder and opened it. "He's as clean as whistle. He's either a saint or bloody good at covering his tracks. I take it you did this search on him when he invested in the Academy."

"I did." Sirius got back up. "Perscribo Harrison Sebastian."

Harry watched as a folder appeared on the desk. "May I?"

Sirius had taken it out so that Harry could look at it. "It's about you, so go ahead."

Harry opened it up and grinned. "You found nothing out of place."

"Your papers were flawless." Sirius took the folder back from Harry and it vanished as he tapped it with his wand. "How did you manage it?"

"I hoped the same contacts existed here as they did back home." Harry felt quite pleased with himself. "And they did."

"Is there any chance of sharing their names?" Sirius hadn't seen workmanship that flawless in a very long time.

Harry wrote down some names on a piece of parchment and slid it across to Sirius. "While I'm offering things up, we still have quite a lot of basilisk skin available. Some of it has been used to make vests for the girls and Orion. Would you like enough skin to make a vest for Bella?"

"How much?" Sirius asked.

Harry didn't want anything for it. "Consider it a thank you for opening up my memory."

"Then yes, I would." Sirius was surprised at Harry's generosity. "And thank you for supplying one for Cassandra. I had every intention of getting her one once she'd completed her auror training."

"We originally offered one for you but she said that you already own one." Harry revealed that he was aware that Sirius owned one.

Sirius opened his shirt to reveal what Harry knew he had. "If it had been me there that day Albus was attacked, I wouldn't have been injured half as badly."

"You don't know that." Harry pointed out. "They might have ended up using the killing curse to get rid of you instead."

"You might be right but we'll never know." Sirius rebuttoned his shirt and turned to the subject of Harry's memories. "So where do you want to show me these memories of yours?"

"Do you have a pensieve here?" Harry had a feeling Sirius had.

"I do." Sirius got up and, after using an unlocking spell, a section of wall slid back, allowing Sirius to remove his pensieve. "Go ahead."

Harry placed memory after memory into the pensieve before the two men entered it together.

Just as dawn broke, Harry emerged from the pensieve with Sirius. "I wish we'd told you earlier as Cassandra urged us to do. On reflection, I think it was you we were supposed to trust and not Remus as we originally thought."

Sirius ignored the comment about Remus and focused on Harry's comment about his daughter. "Cassandra wanted you to tell me?"

"Yes, and she asked us to more than once." Harry watched as Sirius appeared lost in thought. "Does this mean that you're open to

reconsidering her application now that you know she wanted to tell you?”

Sirius shook his head. “No. I refused her application based on her actions of going into the chamber, and not for failing to tell me about you. But I am going to reduce her grounding to three weeks as she at least tried to convince you to tell me.”

“I’m sure she’ll be pleased to hear that.” Harry wished that Sirius had changed his mind but he did understand Sirius’ motivation. Pulling his wand out, he checked the time. “I think I need to get back to Hogwarts and finish packing.”

“Harry, just so you know, I don’t expect you to register at the Ministry.” Sirius knew it would be hypocritical as he already knew about Remus, and hadn’t required the same from his friend.

“I appreciate that.” Harry yawned. “I can’t wait for today to be over. Good luck with questioning Aditi.”

Suddenly Sirius’ ring vibrated. “Damn.”

“What’s wrong?” Harry could see how tense Sirius had gone.

“My ring’s vibrating which means something has gone seriously wrong.” Sirius glanced at Harry. “What are you willing to bet that it’s something to do with Aditi?”

“Do you want me to come along?” Harry offered.

Sirius reached into his pocket and pulled out the same badge Harry had given him back earlier, and tapped it with his wand. “I would, and Harry, I’d like to make this permanent.”

Harry was stunned. “I’m more than a little surprised.”

“Given your experience as Head Bastard...” Here Sirius grinned despite the possible of the severity of the situation they were likely to be going into. “...and your experience as an Unspeakable, I’d be an idiot not to offer you a position as an Unspeakable again. And before

you ask, in this world they come under my jurisdiction. By the way I've just given you the highest possible clearance outside of Albus'."

Harry knew that meant nothing was off limits to him outside of Albus' personal affairs. "I appreciate this but I've already signed a year's contract as the Defense teacher in Remus' place."

"Let's talk about it when we get back." Sirius knew that they really needed to go as his ring had begun to vibrate again. "Right now I'd like you to come with me. Slip that cloak on and let's go."

Azkaban

Harry stood at Sirius' side as they examined Aditi's cell. "They certainly didn't want us to find anything out, did they?"

The guard standing at the door shivered as Harry's voice seemed to emerge from the depths of his hooded cloak. He'd known from Harry's attire that he was an Unspeakable, and this was further borne out when Harry turned out to have top level clearance but wasn't required to reveal who he was.

Sirius scowled. "I'd say that they didn't want us to recognize her let alone question her." He stepped over what was left of Aditi to examine the guards who'd been killed. "The healers said it was snake venom."

Harry pulled Sirius aside, and invoked a privacy bubble. "Does Azkaban have anti-animagus wards?"

"No." Sirius rolled his eyes as he realized why Harry had asked. "Fuck, fuck, fuck. I should have realized."

"Why would you?" Harry commiserated with him. "None of these bodies have bite marks on them, just evidence of the venom."

"So why did you think of it?" Sirius asked.

"Because we made the same mistake ourselves." Harry admitted.

"I'll get onto it." Sirius was angry with himself but pushed it aside to concentrate on the matter at hand.

The Ministry - Sirius' office

Three hours later Harry found himself sitting down in Sirius' office once more. "So what made you offer me the position as an Unspeakable?"

"As I've already said, your lifetime experience as an Auror and Unspeakable, and if this Dominus is who you think he is, you've got the most experience out of all of us in dealing with him." Sirius turned the badge Harry had given him back over and over in his hands. "To say nothing of the fact that apart from our Voldemort, who Albus easily defeated, we haven't really seen anything of this magnitude since Grindelwald."

"How magically strong is Minister Dumbledore?" Harry wanted to know if Sirius' Voldemort had been particularly weak or Dumbledore particularly strong.

"He's one of the strongest, if not the strongest, magical being I know." Sirius frowned. "For someone to be able to overcome him as they did, they were either very lucky or very powerful. Unfortunately Albus can't remember anything about the attack, and neither can Bella. I've tried to find a memory as I did with you but nothing. Obviously Dominus didn't expect you to even know you'd been obliviated and he didn't take quite so much care with the crafting of the obliviation spell. With Albus and Bella whoever tampered with their memories is skilled far beyond my capabilities with mind arts. Even Albus was unable to find anything amiss in Bella's mind, and he's our foremost expert."

"Do you want me to examine her?" Harry offered. "Like you, I'm skilled but obviously I couldn't check my own mind."

"It can't hurt to try." Sirius doubted, however, that Harry would succeed where everyone had failed. "Harry, I know you've signed a contract with Hogwarts for next year but in the meantime I'd like you

to consider a consultancy position here, and then after the year is up, making that position permanent.”

“I know you’ve seen my memories of some of the unclassified things I’ve done but that still doesn’t prove I’m capable of handling the position.” Harry knew he’d have reservations if he was in Sirius’ shoes.

Harry was right about his deduction. As much as Sirius wanted him onboard, he still needed to ensure that Harry was truly up to the job. “Which is why you’re going to be taking the standard tests before I sign off on you.”

“We can do them now if you want.” Harry offered, looking forward to the challenge.

“Tomorrow will be fine.” Sirius assured him. “I’m sure you need to get back to Hogwarts and pack as the train is due to leave shortly.”

“I’m not on the Express duty rota so it’s not a problem but I do want to get back as I want to speak to James before he leaves.” Feeling bad about Cassandra, Harry had had an idea. “I’m being allowed to take on an assistant next year and I want to talk to both you and him about it.”

Sirius laughed. “An assistant who needs an assistant.”

“Normally that would be the case.” Harry explained his need. “But Remus has decided that he’s only going to be doing the bare minimum of one hour per week to fulfill his magical contract which is why I’m going to be teaching full-time and can take on an assistant. It’s not just me though. As Mione was such a success, you probably already know it’s been decided that all teachers can take assistants on.”

“I’m aware of that.” Sirius had heard about it from Albus. “So what has that got to do with me?”

“I want to offer Cassandra the position as my assistant but I wanted to check with you first that it’s alright to do so.” Harry informed him.

"Of course it would be dependent upon her results, and I will have to speak to James about it."

"Are you doing this out of guilt or because you really think Cassandra is up to the job?" Sirius wanted to ascertain what Harry's motives were.

"I admit I do feel guilty about her losing her spot in the Corps but I wouldn't offer her the job unless I thought she was good enough." Harry assured Sirius. "And to be perfectly truthful I fully expect Cassandra to finish top of the school so I'd be a fool to let a prime candidate slip through my fingers."

Sirius agreed with Harry's expectations of his daughter. "I expect her to do the same and I believe she might be interested. I also don't have a problem with you offering her the position, especially as I now know more about you. However, even though I'm happy for you to talk it through with James, I'd prefer it if you'd wait for Cassandra's grounding to come to an end before you tell her. I know it's cruel but I want her to be able to reflect on what she's had to give up because of a stupid and ill-thought out decision."

"I won't say anything until you say that it's fine for me to do so." Harry assured Sirius. "I'll be back tomorrow then. Is ten okay?"

"That would be perfect. Keep the cloak and this badge." Sirius handed it back over yet again. "You'll be able to walk straight through security without a problem. Meet me in the dueling room on the second floor."

"I know the place." Harry smiled. "It's been a pleasure, Sirius."

"Likewise." Sirius yawned. "Now I'm off home to get a few hours sleep before coming back here." He hesitated. "On second thoughts can you wait to ask James about Cassie? I don't want to have to try and explain to him why I've retracted her offer, as I'd rather he think it was her decision."

"I'll do that." Harry shook Sirius' hand. "Ten o'clock tomorrow then."

"I'll see you then." Sirius followed Harry to the door before closing it behind him.

Three weeks later

Cassandra looked up from the book she was reading. "Come in."

Harry put his head around the door. "Cassandra?"

"Harry." Cassandra's voice became lackluster and a little cool when she saw who it was.

"I know I'm not your favorite person right now." Harry stepped into the room and closed the door behind him. "But I hope to try and make things up to you."

"How?" Cassandra couldn't see how he could possibly make it up to her.

"With these." Harry held out an envelope. "They're your results."

"I don't want them." Cassandra took the envelope and threw it onto the dresser.

"Please open them." Harry urged. "As I'm not leaving until you do."

Angrily Cassandra snatched the envelope up and ripped it open before scanning the results. "There, I've looked. Happy now?"

Harry took the parchment from her and, as he and Sirius had expected, she'd finished top of the year passing every single one of her exams with flying colors. "Extremely. I've got something to ask you."

"What?" Cassandra knew she was being rude but after being stuck alone in her room for three weeks, and not being allowed out even for her meals which had been delivered by a house-elf who didn't say a word to her, Harry was the last person she wanted to talk to.

"I want to offer you the position as my assistant for the coming year at Hogwarts." Harry crossed his fingers.

Cassandra stared in amazement at Harry. "Did Dad ask you to do it?"

Harry shook his head. "Not at all but he's happy if you decide to take the position. He also said that he'll allow your application to the Auror Corps next year, so your position, like mine will be temporary."

Cassandra frowned. "Why is your position going to be temporary?"

Sirius had given Harry permission to tell Cassandra about his new job offer. "I'm going to be working for your Dad at the end of the next school year as an Unspeakable, and acting as a consultant in the meantime. Only your Dad, Aunt Bella and yourself are aware of this though." Harry had allowed Sirius to fill Bella in on his background as she was Sirius' immediate subordinate.

Cassandra's mouth fell open. "But you're not qualified."

"Not in this world, no, but I'm more than qualified by virtue of my prior experience in my own." Harry reminded her. "I did, however, have to go through a battery of tests with your Dad before he finally approved the offer."

"Did you get to duel with Auror Moody?" Cassandra forgot her annoyance with Harry to ask about the legendary hard-assed Auror.

"I took on him and your Dad at the same time." Harry told her.

"How badly did they beat you?" Cassandra believed that Harry would have stood no chance.

Harry merely smirked. "After your Dad picked himself up for the third time and enervated Auror Moody yet again, I think they decided that I was more than qualified."

"You're joking?" Cassandra couldn't believe it.

Harry shook his head. "Nope. I also got some of the highest scores ever recorded for magical strength, and I'm actually going to be re-writing some of the training protocols for defense."

"Now you're just showing off." Cassandra was impressed though. "So this position; if I take it, what will it entail?"

Harry spent twenty minutes telling her what he'd expect from her. "And James and Minerva have both signed off on you already."

Cassandra's face fell. "I'm surprised they let you offer it to me especially after Dad kicked me out of the Corps."

"They don't know Sirius did that." Harry informed her. "Sirius told them that you felt you needed a little more defense experience before you took on the Corps, and had therefore asked him to hold your application back for a year."

Cassandra felt tears come to her eyes at her Dad's protectiveness. "Is he still angry with me?" Sirius had deliberately kept away from Cassandra.

"No, he's not." Harry assured her. "In fact he's waiting for you in his study, but before you run off, will you at least consider the assistant's position?"

"I don't need to consider it." Cassandra knew that she wasn't going to get a better offer while she waited for a year until she could follow her true passion. "I'd like the job."

Harry's face broke into a grin. "I'm relieved to hear it."

"You only want me because I was top of my year." Cassandra teased, suddenly feeling lighthearted for the first time since Sirius had punished her.

"Damn straight." Harry opened the door. "Now go."

Cassandra ran down to see her Dad.

Sirius got up when a tentative rap sounded at his door. "Come in."

Cassandra nervously entered the room. "Dad?"

Sirius held out his arms and Cassandra burst into tears as she hurried into them. "I'm really sorry, Dad, and I'll never do anything like that again."

Sirius could feel tears in his own eyes as Cassandra sobbed against him. "I'm sorry too, Cassie."

After a few minutes, Cassandra felt better, and told Sirius about her talk with Harry. "Harry told me what you did for me. You're really going to let me join the Auror Corps next year?"

"As Harry said to me when he explained he wanted to offer you the position as his assistant, I'd be a fool to let a prime candidate like you slip through my fingers." Sirius kissed Cassandra's forehead.

"Dad, how's Faith doing?" Cassandra asked suddenly as she remembered about her stepmother.

"Quite well actually." Sirius let go of his daughter and leant against the desk. "Craig said that compared to Eleanor, Faith is holding up much better, so I can't help but hope that things might turn out differently."

"I know I didn't like Faith when I first met her, and I wasn't exactly overjoyed when I found out you'd married her, but if there's anything I can do, Dad, then I'll do it." Cassandra offered. "I can sit with her when you're at work if you're worried about her."

"I appreciate that." Sirius was touched that Cassandra had been truly honest with him, and had made the offer. "But I think Faith would kill me if I started to let you mollycoddle her. She's already bitten my head off more than once when I've tried to wrap her up in cotton wool."

Cassandra grinned. "I'd like to have seen that."

"I bet you would." Sirius stood up. "So have you decided to take up Harry's offer?"

"I'm going to do it. Hopefully I'll be able to share the suite with Luna as she's still keeping it for this year." Cassandra intended to write to Minerva to ask.

"You will be sharing it." Sirius confirmed. "I didn't tell Harry but I told James that you'd already accepted the offer if your exam results were good enough."

"Dad!" Cassandra was a little indignant.

"And even better, Katherine will be joining you." Sirius watched his daughter's face light up. "She's taken the position as James' assistant, and like you, it's going to be temporary."

Cassandra was puzzled. "Why only temporary?"

"Because she's getting married next year, and Orion doesn't want her remaining at Hogwarts." Sirius covered his ears as Cassandra's delighted scream ricocheted around his study. "I take it you're happy?"

"When did this happen?" Cassandra couldn't believe she'd missed it.

"Two nights ago." Sirius told her. "But I knew he was going to ask her the day after his grounding finished. He asked me to take him to Cloisters so that he could pick out a ring, and then to talk to James."

"I know Uncle James wouldn't have refused his permission." Cassandra was beyond happy for her brother and friend. "You're pleased as well aren't you?"

"Ecstatic." Sirius assured his daughter. "Orion and Katherine are both at Luna's today, so you'll have to wait for them to return to deafen them as well, as I want you to join Harry, Tonks, James, and myself for dinner."

"What about Faith?" Cassandra noted her stepmother's omission.

"She's visiting friends in New York." Sirius hadn't been happy about letting Faith out of his sight and more so to a foreign country, but she'd promised to take an international portkey with her and that she'd use it in case of emergency.

"Is dinner formal?" Cassandra hoped not.

"No." Sirius assured her. "Now off you go."

Harry was still in Cassandra's bedroom when she returned. "I hope you didn't mind me waiting but your Dad said I might as well hang around as dinner is going to be in less than an hour."

"I can't believe you're still with Tonks." Cassandra blurted out. "Dad said she was coming to dinner so I presumed it had to be with you."

Harry was a little taken aback at Cassandra's comment. "Am I that bad?"

Cassandra laughed. "It's not you. It's just that I've never known anyone last this long with her. Have you told her about who you are yet?"

"No." Harry had thought about it before deciding against it. "Our relationship isn't exactly going to be what you'd call permanent."

Cassandra wasn't sure if she felt disappointed or relieved. "Is that your choice or hers?"

"Both." Harry then pointedly changed the subject. "So what do you think about Katherine and Orion?"

Cassandra recognized the polite snub for what it was. "I'm really pleased for them. I was a little surprised at how quickly Orion proposed though."

"I think spending two weeks alone being grounded helped him make his decision." Harry laughed. "I think he believes that once he's married he'll be spared that sort of treatment."

“He doesn’t know Dad well enough then.” Cassandra laughed as well. “I’ve got to get ready for dinner.”

“I’ll see you downstairs then.” Harry took the hint and left.

At dinner Cassandra found herself seated opposite Harry and Tonks. They’d just finished dessert when Tonks knocked her wine all over Harry’s shirt. “I’m so sorry, Harry.”

Harry stood up. “Will you all excuse me?”

Cassandra frowned as Tonks followed out. She could have sworn that Tonks had done it on purpose. She wasn’t wrong.

Harry knew Tonks was behind him as he walked to the bathroom to wash out the red wine from his shirt as he knew from experience that if he simply vanished it from the shirt he was wearing, it would inevitably never feel the same again. After splashing water on his shirt, he surprised Tonks when he yanked open the door and pulled her inside before dragging her against him so that she was held against his wet shirt. “You did that on purpose, didn’t you?”

Tonks didn’t deny it. “I was bored and wanted a kiss. I don’t think Uncle Sirius would have been very impressed if I’d tried to do it at the dinner table.”

Harry smirked. “I might have been.”

Tonks cupped his bottom with her hands. “Show me how impressed.”

Harry spent the next few minutes showing her exactly how impressed he would have been. “Now I think you’d better get back.”

Tonks slid her hand around to the front of Harry’s trousers. “Why don’t we just go back to my place instead?”

Harry groaned. “Tonks, for goodness sake.”

Tonks laughed. “Lighten up, Sebastian. You know want me.”

"How did you guess?" Harry groaned again as Tonks increased the pressure of her hand.

"I don't know what gave it away." Tonks removed her hand. "I'll see you back at the dinner table."

Harry waited a few minutes for his obvious problem to disappear before drying his shirt and heading back to the dining room where he smiled politely as he sat back down next to Tonks. "I'm sorry about that."

Cassandra looked pointedly at Tonks' blouse which was still damp. "I'm sure Tonks was able to help dry you off."

Harry could have throttled his girlfriend who looked innocently at him. "I'm sure she was."

Sirius stood up. "I think it's time to move this into the drawing room."

Tonks also stood up and took Harry's hand. "Would you mind if we actually called it a night?"

Sirius hid his amusement at his cousin's obvious desire to leave. "Of course not, Tonks."

Harry removed his hand from Tonks, and shook both Sirius' and James' hands. "Thanks for the nice evening." Cassandra stiffened as Harry kissed her cheek making Harry frown slightly. "I'll be in touch about the position, okay?"

Cassandra smiled politely. "I'll look forward to it. If everyone will excuse me, I'm off to bed."

Tonks had had enough waiting and grabbed Harry's hand. "Night Uncle Sirius, James."

The two men didn't have a chance to say anything as Tonks apparated herself and Harry into her bedroom. Harry scowled at her. "Don't you think you were a bit rude there?"

Tonks shrugged. "I'm not going to apologize if that's what you expect."

"I don't." Harry watched as Tonks started to pull off her clothes. "What are you doing?"

"What do you think I'm doing?" Tonks stopped in the middle of unbuttoning her blouse. "I didn't leave in a hurry so that we could just sit and talk."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "How do you know I'm still interested after your behavior?"

Tonks placed her hand back on the front of Harry's trousers, smiling triumphantly as she felt him respond to her touch. "I think the evidence speaks for itself. Now get undressed."

Harry did as she asked. "Haven't you ever heard of foreplay?"

"Highly overrated at a time like this." Tonks by now was naked. "So get on that bed, lie back and think of England."

Harry's laugh was cut off as Tonks covered her mouth with his.

In the house they'd just left, Cassandra angrily stomped upstairs. "Of all the bloody boorish..."

Sirius came up behind her. "Cassie, what's wrong?"

"Don't you think Tonks was rather impolite?" Cassandra halted at her door.

"Yes, but you should be used to that by now." Sirius frowned. "Is she the only reason you're angry?"

Cassandra was confused by Sirius' comment. "Yes, why else would I be angry?"

Sirius realized that Cassandra was truly astounded by his question.
“Forget it. Sleep well.”

“Night Dad.” Cassandra kissed Sirius’ cheek and went into her room.

Next Chapter: Thomas makes a shocking discovery; Bill Weasley meets a new client.

Chapter 18: The Cat Is Out of the Bag

August 20th 2003

Mione stood in the room she used when she stayed on the island and ran a hand over the wedding gown that hung at the back of the closet. She found it difficult to believe she was actually getting married in less than a week's time. She'd been beyond stunned when Thomas had proposed.

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Mione took the letter the house-elf had brought into the room. "Thank you."

Thomas watched Mione's emotions play across her face. "Good news?"

"Orion has asked Katherine to marry him." Mione's answered happily. "She's not getting married until next year though according to this. Can we have them over to dinner next weekend to celebrate?"

Thomas already knew he wasn't going to be free. "I'm going to Sydney, so I can't, but you can go ahead."

"It's not my house." Mione observed. Thomas had bought the house in Grimmauld Square two months after he'd started seeing Mione, so that he wouldn't constantly have to travel back and forth from his house on the island.

"I've already said you can use it anytime you want to entertain your friends." Thomas reminded her. "Speaking of entertaining, my family are coming to dinner tomorrow night."

"You never mentioned they were in England." Mione put down the parchment.

"Last minute thing." Thomas stood up. "I've got something to do this afternoon but would you like to go out to dinner tonight?"

"I'd love to." Mione also got up. "I've got some work with me that needs doing so I'm going to spend the rest of this morning on that, and then I'm going to go home and spend some time with Remus discussing it but I should be back by about five."

"You can shower and change here." Thomas kissed Mione on the cheek before walking out, and calling back. "I'll book a table for eight o'clock."

The Next Day

Mione dressed carefully for dinner before running downstairs. "Remus, is there anything else you need before I leave?"

Remus glanced up and smiled. "Not at all. You look lovely."

"Thanks." Mione checked her hair again in the mirror.

"You seem nervous." Remus noted.

"Thomas' family is going to be at dinner." Mione informed him. "I always feel a little nervous around them, almost as though I'm lacking."

Remus shook his head. "Don't be nervous. After all, one of your best friends is the head of the Watchers' Council."

Mione relaxed as Remus had hoped she'd do. "Very funny, Remus." She bent down and kissed his cheek. "I don't know what time I'll be back, but I'll look at the Vadema papers when I get in."

"Don't be silly." Remus ushered her into the hallway. "I'm up-to-date so I'll look at them while you're out."

"Thanks." Mione took a deep breath. "Wish me luck."

Remus winked at her. "You don't need it."

Thomas was waiting for Mione in the drawing room. "That's a very nice dress."

Mione ran a hand down the lavender silk dress. "I always feel underdressed when your parents are here so I thought I'd make an extra effort."

"You don't need to do that; you always dress beautifully." Thomas walked over with a glass of champagne. "While my parents are finishing dressing, there's something I want to talk to you about. Come with me."

Mione took the champagne, and let Thomas lead her out to the conservatory that graced the rear of the house. "I love it out here, especially as you have my favorite roses growing."

"I knew how much you liked them which is why I had them planted." Thomas stopped as they reached a bench which sat inside a small ornate nook that flanked a small lily pond. "Sit down."

Mione sat down and was a little surprised when Thomas didn't sit down next to her. She thought he looked nervous, something she'd never observed before. "Thomas, is everything alright?" Her heart suddenly felt as if it was in her mouth as Thomas bent down on one knee in front of her, and took her hand.

Thomas could feel Mione shaking as he held her hand. "Mione, I know we've only been seeing each for four months but it's long enough for me to know that I love you, and want to marry you."

"I didn't expect this." Mione put down the champagne flute before she spilt its contents as she was shaking so badly. "Thomas, I don't know if I can accept."

"Why not?" Thomas asked quietly. "I thought you loved me."

Mione placed her hand on his face. "I do; more than anything."

"Then why won't you accept?" Thomas had a feeling he knew why she'd refused.

His suspicions about Mione's refusal were confirmed with Mione's words. "Because I can't have children and I know how much you want an heir. I don't want you to marry me and regret it later."

"Is that the only thing holding you back?" Thomas remained where he was.

Even though Thomas had refused to listen when she'd tried to tell him before, Mione knew the time had come to tell him about herself. "No, I want to tell you about my past."

"Mione, I told you the previous time you wanted to discuss this, that I don't care what you've done or who you've slept with." Thomas kissed Mione's hand. "I've done things myself that many would find abhorrent, so I'm far from being above reproach."

Like the previous time the subject had come up, Mione thought Thomas was just trying to humor her. "I find that hard to believe."

Thomas knew that Mione would think differently if she knew the truth. "But it's still true."

Mione didn't believe him. "Anyway, it doesn't matter as I don't need to know your past history. You've been nothing but caring, kind and loving towards me and that's all I need to know. But I still need to tell you about mine."

Thomas disagreed with her. "For the last time, if you don't want to know about my past, then I don't need you to confess your sins to me. So why don't we agree to let our pasts remain exactly that, our pasts. This is about our future. So I'll ask again, is it now only your inability to have children that is holding you back?"

"Yes." Mione admitted. "If it wasn't for that, then I'd say yes without reservation but you're the Seville heir and I'm well aware that your parents expect you as their eldest son to continue the line."

"Then I should tell you that the reason I'm going to Sydney next weekend is to finalize an adoption." Thomas felt Mione stiffen. "But only if you agree to it."

Mione was reeling. "This is all very sudden."

"Then this is going to be even more sudden." Thomas hoped it wasn't too overwhelming for Mione. "If you agree to marry me, then I want to get married next month."

Mione gasped. "Why so soon?"

"The healers taking care of the twins' mother have said that they don't believe she'll carry the babies to term, which is apparently normal with twins." Thomas hadn't known until the healers had told him. "And I plan to make the boy my blood heir."

"Twins?" Mione echoed in a shocked voice.

Thomas explained. "A boy and a girl. The mother is from a pureblood Australian family whose boyfriend got her pregnant then refused to marry her. If she didn't give up the children her family threatened to disown her, as they didn't want the shame of their daughter giving birth outside of marriage. When I found about the twins I had no intention of ever getting married, and never believed I'd fall in love, so I made the offer to adopt the children with the intention of making the boy my heir."

Mione felt sorry for the unknown girl. "What about the father of the children?"

"A Muggleborn who fled when he found out." Thomas didn't bother to hide his disgust at the boy.

"How did you find out about them?" Mione continued to question Thomas.

"My family has been friends with hers for a long time." Thomas didn't go into any more detail than that. "I've known about the twins for just over four months now but I still should have probably told you about them sooner."

"It wasn't any of my business until now." Mione correctly pointed out. "And four months ago you didn't even know if things would work out between us."

Thomas agreed with Mione. "You're right, I didn't. When I started pursuing you during the conference, I just knew that I was more attracted to you than anyone else I'd ever met."

Mione smiled softly. "And I felt the same way about you."

"I didn't realize I was in love with you until that first time we slept together." Thomas watched red creep up Mione's cheeks. "As I watched you sleeping I knew then that I didn't want to let you go."

Mione felt warm inside at his words. "I was so frightened it would all go horribly wrong that night, and you were so gentle with me."

"Which is one of the reasons I knew I was in love with you." Thomas touched her face. "I've never wanted to take care of anyone like I wanted to do with you."

Mione shivered as his fingertips brushed against her lips. "Why didn't you tell me about the children then?"

Thomas knew he was going to upset Mione when he told her. "Because I didn't want you thinking that I was only dating you to provide me with a mother for the children, and even though I was in love with you, I still didn't know how you felt about me."

Mione felt a pang of hurt. "As I'd already told you I couldn't get pregnant before we slept together, you were concerned that I'd say I was in love with you just for the children, weren't you?"

"Yes." Thomas sighed. "I wanted you to say you loved me for myself, and not for the fact that I came along with the twins."

"So you waited until the last possible moment to tell me instead." Mione wasn't too happy that he'd left it so long.

Thomas apologized. "I'm sorry. However, I told the girl's family last month that I was planning to ask you to marry me, and that if you didn't want the children but still wished to marry me, then I wouldn't be continuing with the adoption, as you mean more to me than anything, including an heir."

Thomas' words made Mione realize how much he truly loved her, and she started to cry. Thomas got up and slipped his arm around her shoulder, holding her head against his shoulder as she sobbed quietly until she eventually quietened and sat up and began to babble. "I don't know what to say. I love you and want to marry you but I don't know about the children, and I don't want to rob them of a parent or you of the children if I say I don't want them, to say nothing of that poor girl."

"Mione, if I don't adopt the children, then I've promised that I'll find alternative parents for them, so don't let worry about the twins and their mother's situation concern you. Right now I think you should take some time to think things over as this has been a lot to take in." Thomas said gently as he wiped Mione's tears from her cheeks.

Mione stood up. "Will you make my apologies to your parents?"

"Of course." Thomas kissed Mione softly. "Go home, and I'll see you when you've thought things through."

Mione apparated directly out from the conservatory back to Remus' house, surprising Remus who had just walked into the hallway. "Mione, what's wrong?"

Mione burst into tears again. "Thomas asked me to marry him."

"I thought you'd be happy about it." Remus put his arm around her and led her to sit down. "So what's the problem?"

Through her tears, Mione told him about Thomas' proposal and their discussion. "I don't know what to do."

"Do you love him?" Remus asked the question he considered the most important first.

"More than I've ever loved anyone." Mione admitted. "Even more than I loved Harry and I never thought I'd say that."

Remus was glad that Harry wasn't around to hear that even though he'd appeared to have moved on with Tonks. "And do you want to marry Thomas?"

Mione answered earnestly. "Yes, I do."

"So your only stumbling block is the children, isn't it?" Remus asked gently.

Mione nodded. "I feel so badly that I can't give Thomas the children and heir he wants, so adopting the twins would be a perfect opportunity."

"So why are you baulking?" Remus asked bluntly. "Be honest with me."

"I think it's too soon." Mione answered truthfully. "But I'm also aware that an opportunity like this isn't going to come my way again anytime soon."

Remus noticed that Mione hadn't said anything about her own needs. "You say that you feel guilty about not being able to give Thomas an heir, but what about you? Do you actually want children?"

"More than anything." Mione's biggest regret was that even though she could adopt, she'd never be able to carry a child of her own. "It's just that I'm not sure if I'm ready for them yet."

"Then you should say no." Remus told her brusquely.

"I'm afraid if I say no, then I'm not going to have another chance." Suddenly just wanting to be alone, Mione stood up. "Remus, thanks for listening to me but right now I think I need a little time to try and think things through."

"Take tomorrow off." Remus offered. "You can't decide this overnight."

The Next Day

The next day found Mione sitting opposite Faith Black in a New York restaurant as they ate breakfast together. "I can't believe Remus arranged this."

"Neither can I." Faith didn't mind though. "I hope you didn't mind that Remus told me about Thomas and the adoption. He said you're having a problem with the whole baby thing."

"I am." Mione admitted. "But I really don't see why Remus thought it would be a good idea to talk to you especially as your situation is so different. I can't imagine what you must be going through so my problems don't even compare. Has anything changed?"

"No, but I don't care what Craig and the rest of the medical profession says, I have every intention of getting through this." Faith said in a resolute voice. "I didn't finally drag myself out of a shithole of a miserable life to find the perfect guy only to be told that I'm expected to roll over and die because I'm carrying his son."

"You really do love Sirius, don't you?" Mione knew all about Faith's past, courtesy of the position she held with Remus.

"I'm not exactly the true love type, but yeah I do. He doesn't stand for my shit but he's not an asshole either." Faith gave a quirky grin. "And of course he's rich."

"You don't really care about the money though, do you?" Mione knew that even though Sirius was nowhere near as wealthy as Thomas was, if Faith was anything like her, the money didn't even come into the equation.

"Not in the slightest." Faith confirmed Mione's belief. "I admit it turned my head a little at first but that's not what Sirius is about."

"Neither is Thomas." Mione looked down at the empty space on her left hand. "I want to marry him but I'm unsure as to what to do about the children. I know I want children but I didn't expect it to be so soon."

Faith knew then why Remus had connected the two of them. "Unlike you, I never thought I wanted to be a mother, not even after I married Sirius. When that Healer guy told me I was pregnant, I was shocked. When I found out about Orion and what Sirius had gone through, I thought I couldn't bear to see him go through that again, and I wasn't that bothered about the baby. However, when Craig lifted that wand to put me to sleep and take away my baby, I felt something I'd never felt before. I don't know how to explain it. It was almost like a wave of protectiveness for the innocent inside of me, and I couldn't do it."

"How does it feel?" Mione asked softly.

"He's not even here yet, and I'd do anything for him, including die if it comes down to that." Faith admitted. "But more than that, I understand why Sirius' wife did what she did."

"I'm sorry but this is going to sound harsh." Mione apologized. "Your son isn't going to be heir and if things don't work out, then you're going to be leaving Sirius alone. Don't you love him enough to give up the baby?"

"It's because I love him that I can't give the baby up." Faith tried to explain herself. "This baby represents both of us, and he was made out of our love." Faith shook her head at herself disparagingly. "Listen to me; the girl who didn't believe in true love!" Faith stared intently at Mione. "But I least I had a crack at it, and if I die our son will represent the love I feel for Sirius, and I hope he can look at him and understand that."

Knowing what Faith had once been like, and after listening to Faith's heartfelt declaration of love for Sirius and her child, Mione burst into tears. "I feel so selfish now. You could die carrying your baby and might never get the chance to hold it, while I've got the opportunity to be a mother without the worry and concern you've got." Mione then

realized what she'd said. "Oh Merlin, Faith, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that to you."

"I've already said I'm going to see this thing through so don't get so upset." Faith hadn't meant to make Mione cry, and handed her a napkin. "Just because I'm having a tough time doesn't mean that you should decide to have kids just because you feel guilty about it. It's got to be because you want these kids, Mione."

"I know that." Mione wiped her eyes on the napkin. "But hearing you talk like that makes me aware that I'd do anything for Thomas, even this."

"If it's not what you want, then you'll resent them." Faith knew that only too well from her experience with her own mother. "So if you do decide to go ahead and adopt the children, then make sure it's what you really want."

"I will." Mione squeezed Faith's hand. "Thanks for talking to me."

"Someone's got to." Faith grinned. "Now I know I can't have anything and it's kinda early, but do you want something to drink?"

Mione shook her head. "I'm going to pay the bill, get some fresh air and then head home."

"I'll take care of the check." Faith stood up and hugged Mione. "If you ever need anyone to talk to, come to me. I don't really have many friends, and Sirius' kids aren't exactly my greatest fans so you know..."

"I know." Mione hugged the girl back. "Look after yourself."

"I will." Faith kissed Mione's cheek. "Bye."

"Bye." Mione hurried out of the restaurant and headed for Central Park so that she could think in calmer surroundings than the busy area she was currently walking through.

Later that day

Thomas was sitting in his study when Mione knocked on the door. "Come in."

Mione opened the door and put her head around around. "Are you busy?"

"It's nothing that can't wait." Thomas was busy but he was more anxious to get Mione's answer. "Are you alright?"

"Will you hold me?" Mione wanted nothing more than to feel Thomas' arms around her.

Getting up and walking around his desk, Thomas enfolded Mione in his arms, relishing the feel of her against his body. "I missed you yesterday."

"I missed you as well." Mione tightened her grip around him before releasing him. "But I really need to talk to you about last night."

Thomas finally let her go, and stepped away. "Before we do, would you like a glass of wine?"

Mione took a deep breath. "I think a glass of champagne might be more appropriate."

Thomas went still. "Does this mean what I think it means?"

"If you think it means that I'll marry you, then yes it does." Mione thought her nerves were going to get the best of her as she waited for Thomas to respond.

Thomas brought up the main issue that they'd discussed. "And the children?"

"I want to go ahead with the adoption." Mione informed him.

"Mione, are you really sure about this?" As much as he wanted to adopt the children, Thomas didn't want Mione to feel forced.

Mione nodded. "I've spent some time over breakfast talking to Faith Black, and she helped me to see things a little differently."

Thomas was confused. "How did Faith Black help you?"

Mione briefly explained about the baby Faith was carrying. "I felt panicked last night at the thought of becoming a mother so quickly but with what she's going through, she made me realize that some chances only come once in a lifetime."

"That's a tough break for them both." Thomas commiserated about the news. "But I still don't want you to make this decision lightly. Faith's right and you shouldn't make this decision based on what she's going through, and what I want."

"I'm not." Mione slid her arms back around his waist. "I want to marry you, and I think we should adopt the children."

Thomas lowered his head and kissed her fiercely. "I love you so much."

"The feeling is entirely mutual." Mione assured him before he let go of her.

Now that his hands were free, Thomas reached into his pocket and took out a box before once more dropping to one knee. "Let's do this properly then. Mione Dominic, will you marry me?"

Tears glistening in her eyes, Mione nodded. "Nothing would make me happier."

At her words, Thomas opened the box. "If you don't like it, I'll arrange for the jewelers to show you some others."

Mione gasped at the beautifully cut heart shaped pink diamond ring that lay nestled in the box. "Thomas, it's stunning."

Thomas got up, took the ring out and slid it onto Mione's finger. "I'm glad you like it. I spent hours trying to decide on the right one."

Mione slid her hands into his hair and pulled his head down to hers so that she could kiss him. "I wouldn't have cared if it was a plastic ring."

"If I'd known that I'd have just bought you..." Thomas smiled as he let the words die away as Mione interrupted him.

"No, you wouldn't have." Mione laughed before becoming serious. "I'm sorry I reacted as I did last night. Your parents must have thought me terribly rude."

"Mione, it's perfectly alright. I told them that you were unwell and they were concerned about you. Anyway, they're still here as we're flying back to Sydney together on Thursday." Thomas informed her. "So if you don't mind, I'd like to tell them the good news now."

"I hope they think that it's good news." Mione felt her nerves begin to resurface.

"My mother's already hinted often enough that you'd make the perfect wife, so I shouldn't worry too much about it. Come on, they'll be down shortly." With that Thomas led Mione out to the drawing room to wait for his parents.

Present Time

Closing the door to the closet, Mione yawned, before apparating into Thomas' bedroom and getting into bed. After waiting twenty minutes and Thomas still hadn't come to bed, Mione rolled over and went to sleep.

As Mione slept, Thomas worked on the two potions he needed for the adoption ritual for the babies which had been born two days previously, and the blood heir ritual for his new son. He knew that Mione had planned to make the potions herself but he couldn't risk her seeing his former name if it came to light as he believed it would. After adding his, Mione's and the new babies' blood to the potion, Thomas pulled out a sheet of parchment paper.

After watching the potion turn a creamy color indicating it was ready, Thomas spoke the words of the adoption ritual as he trickled several drops of the potion onto the parchment. As he'd expected, the babies' new names appeared at the bottom of the parchment paper, then his name and his former name, with the lineage of the Seville family appearing above it together with the lineage of his former family, the Riddles and the Gaunts.

After his own display of lineage ended after going back three generations, Mione's name appeared above the babies' names. Thomas frowned as no parents' names appeared above it. Thomas almost dropped the pipette he was holding in shock as the name 'Hermione Virginie Snape Lupin' appeared at the side of 'Mione Dominic'. He then watched as Severus Snape and Virginie Lestranger's names appeared as well as Sirius Black's, plus the names of their parents as well.

Thomas slumped onto the stool that stood at the workstation as he stared in disbelief at the parchment. Folding it up, Thomas made his way back upstairs.

Mione woke up to find Thomas nowhere to be seen. After getting dressed and showering, she walked into the dining room and helped herself to breakfast. She'd just finished when Thomas walked in. "Good morning."

"Good morning." Thomas didn't kiss her as he normally did.

Mione suddenly felt worried as Thomas had a strange expression on his face. "Thomas, is something wrong?"

"You might say that." Thomas walked over to where she was sitting. "Last night I thought I'd save you the bother of making the adoption and blood heir potions."

Mione realized that Thomas must have seen her former name. "Thomas, I know how it must look but I can explain."

"I'd like to hear you try. However, before you start lying to me, in the interests of candor, perhaps you'd better take a look at this." Thomas handed over the parchment.

Mione unfolded the parchment, turning white as she saw the name Tom Marvolo Riddle at the side of Thomas' own name. She looked apprehensively at him. "Is this some kind of joke?"

"It's no joke." Thomas' voice held no warmth as he spoke. "So Mione, or perhaps I should call you Hermione instead, when were you going to tell me about yourself?"

Even though she was afraid, Mione stuck out her chin. "I tried once before and then again when you proposed last month but you said that our pasts didn't matter." Mione held up the parchment. "Now I know why."

Thomas sat on the edge of the table and stared down at Mione. "Who'd have thought it? That out of all the people I could have fallen in love with, somehow I managed to pick the woman who'd been sent to try and destroy me."

Mione could feel her heart pounding in her chest. "How could you know what I'm doing here?"

Thomas noticed that Mione didn't deny why she was there. "Atropos warned me someone had followed me over."

Mione felt her heart sink as Thomas mentioned the Sister of Fate. "Atropos is helping you?"

"She paid me a visit months ago." Thomas leant closer to Mione. "She told me someone had come after me but she couldn't tell me who. I never thought it would be my own fiancée."

As Thomas said the word 'fiancée', the implications of who Thomas truly was finally hit Mione full force. Pushing past Thomas, Mione darted into the bathroom just off the dining room, where she emptied her stomach time and time again, struggling to get her breath as her

nausea overwhelmed her. She was stunned to feel a cold flannel being placed on the back of her neck.

Thomas rubbed Mione's back as he held her. "Just breathe slowly, Mione."

Mione began to relax at Thomas' gentle touch as he soothed her. Once she could think clearly again, however, she pulled away from him. "Don't touch me."

Thomas removed his hands. "Let's go sit down. I think we need to talk."

Thinking quickly, Mione unsteadily got to her feet. "Let me brush my teeth and I'll be out."

"I'll wait for you in my study." Thomas hesitated before leaving the bathroom. "Oh, and don't think of attempting to apparate or portkey out. The wards are no longer keyed to you."

Using the time to think, Mione was at a loss at what to do until she heard a ship in the distance. Knowing she'd have little time, she hurried out of the bathroom and out onto the verandah before running across the beach and wading into the water up to her neck. Hoping that the wards didn't go out that far Mione activated her emergency portkey.

In his study, Thomas sighed and disappeared before reappearing on the beach. "Accio Mione."

Mione gave a little scream as she shot backwards through the water. Thomas had attenuated the spell so that Mione landed at his feet. "I had a feeling you'd try something."

"What else did you expect?" Mione was in tears from fear and frustration.

"I'd hoped we could talk like two adults." Thomas reached down and pulled her to feet. "But it looks as if I was wrong."

Mione felt icy cold fingers of dread run down her spine. "What are you going to do me?"

"If I'd wanted you dead, you wouldn't have even woken up this morning." Thomas pointed out. "I'm simply going to prevent you from running away again."

Not wanting to be restrained, Mione looked tearfully at him. "Please don't. I'll listen."

"Do you know how hard it is for me to refuse you anything, especially when you look at me like that?" Thomas cupped her face and, lowering his head, kissed her.

Not wanting to anger him, Mione acquiesced to him, before looking up at him when he ended the kiss. "I'm sorry I ran. Please hold me."

Ignoring Mione's wet clothes, Thomas did as she asked, and was therefore caught unawares when Mione dug her wand into his side. Mione met Thomas' eyes as he lifted his head. "Stupefy."

Unconscious, Thomas slumped onto the floor. As she watched him hit the sand, Mione was filled with panic as she knew that the spell wouldn't keep him under forever, and that there was nowhere on the island she could hide where he wouldn't find her. She was also aware that even though she knew she should, she couldn't kill him. Tears began to fall as fear overwhelmed her as she contemplated what he might do to her when he awoke.

Thomas came to to find one of his house-elves standing over him. Angrily he got to his feet. "Where is my fiancée?"

The house-elf bowed low. "Miss Mione gone, Master Thomas."

"What do you mean?" Thomas snarled. "She can't have gone."

"Miss Mione not here, Master Thomas." The house-elf was shaking at the fury that distorted Thomas' features.

“Crucio.” Thomas held the house-elf under the curse until it was no longer moving. He then killed it before calling out. “Trask.”

Another house-elf appeared, terror written all over its face as it spotted its fallen comrade. “Master Thomas, sir.”

“Find my fiancée.” Thomas apparated back to the house.

Thomas knew from the wards that Mione wasn’t on the island, and in spite of being in possession of that knowledge, he still took his anger out on each and every one of his servants who failed to find her. After showering, he sauntered into his bedroom to find one of his house-elves nervously waiting for him. “What is it?”

“Me’s found these, Master Thomas.” The house-elf handed over Mione’s engagement ring and a pile of clothing.

Thomas recognized them straightaway. “Where did you find these?”

“By the water, Master Thomas.” The house-elf pointed out to the ocean.

It was then that Thomas realized exactly how Mione had gotten past the wards. “I want to see someone from Gringotts within the hour.” With that he began to get dressed.

Twenty minutes later Bill Weasley’s portkey deposited him in the foyer of a large house. A man with dark hair and piercing blue eyes made his way up to him. “I’m Thomas Seville.”

Bill held out his hand. “Bill Weasley. Grashok asked me to attend to you.”

“You’re new, aren’t you?” Thomas led the way through the walkway that joined the two halves of the house.

“No. I’m primarily based in Egypt but was vacationing close by when your request came through.” Bill knew it was quite an honor that Grashok had bestowed upon him.

Thomas didn't say anything else but led him outside to the verandah, and pointed at the ocean. "I currently have wards that repel Muggles and stop unauthorized apparition and portkey access. They extend to just over two miles. I want them extended to five."

Bill looked out to sea. "Well, there isn't anything to impede the wards such as other islands. Is it the same on the opposite side?"

"Yes." Thomas led Bill up to the gantry than ran around the conservatory. "Follow me."

Bill was able to see all sides of the island from the gantry. "This is a spectacular piece of property."

"Thank you." Thomas stopped walking. "So do you think you can do it?"

"I'm not going to say yes and then find that I can't." Bill didn't believe in fluffing up his abilities. "I can definitely extend your apparition and ward barrier to four miles but how much further than that remains to be seen. I can however extend your Muggle repelling barrier to eight miles."

"When can you do it?" Thomas wanted it done as soon as possible.

"I can return tomorrow if you want it done in a hurry." Bill offered.

"Do you need to return to the mainland today?" Thomas led the way down the main staircase and into the corridor that ran on the opposite side to his own private rooms.

"Not if you don't want me to." Bill knew that Gringotts would want him to put Thomas' needs before his own.

"I don't. I'd like for you to work on the wards today and stay overnight as my guest as I know it can be tiring." Thomas opened a door. "This room is for you. You'll find new nightclothes and toiletries in the bathroom. If you leave your clothes out tonight, one of the house-elves will launder them and return them to you, or I can arrange for new clothes for you if you'd prefer."

Bill was a little taken aback at Thomas' hospitality. "Laundered is fine, thank you."

Thomas left the door open. "We'll eat lunch before you begin work. It will be served at about one. A house-elf will collect you. I'll let you freshen up now."

Bill closed the door behind him and looked around the room. Walking over to the sitting area, he helped himself to a bottle of water and then headed into the bathroom.

The Font Room

Lachesis span round on Atropos. "You betrayed us."

"No, I didn't." Atropos wasn't bothered by her sister's anger. "I merely ensured my continued existence by striking a deal with Voldemort."

"I knew I shouldn't have let you go." Lachesis was just as angry with herself as she was with Atropos.

"But you couldn't let poor Mione pass on." Atropos reminded her. "And look at the pretty pickle she's gotten herself into now."

"I want the ring back." Lachesis held out her hand.

Atropos shook her head. "I've still four hours of my time left, and I have every intention of using them."

"Do not go anywhere near Mione or Voldemort again." Atropos ordered.

"I'll go where I please." Atropos tartly informed her sister. "We agreed our terms and I stuck to them, albeit a little loosely." She then disappeared, leaving Lachesis fuming.

The Island

Thomas glanced up at the crack. "Atropos, what brings you here?"

"Another bargain." Atropos sat on the edge of his desk. "I know where your missing fiancée is."

"What do you want?" Thomas asked bluntly, not in the mood to mess around.

"My sister has a ring; actually it's this ring." Atropos held out her hand. "When you have dominion over her, then I want this ring and unrestricted time allocated to it."

"Agreed." Thomas didn't care about the ring. "Where is Mione?"

Atropos told him.

Next Chapter: Mione is forced to face her true feelings.

Chapter 19: Facing the Truth

August 20th 2003

Mione woke up to find she was naked and lying wrapped in Thomas' arms back at the villa. The last thing she remembered was Rupert talking quietly to her as she drank the hot chocolate he'd fixed for her. Glancing over at the bedside table, she spotted her wand, and carefully pulling free of Thomas' embrace, she scooted across the bed to grab it.

Before she could get out of the bed, Thomas' voice startled her. "Good evening. Did you sleep well?"

Mione span round, aiming her wand at him, her hand shaking. "Don't come any nearer."

At the sight of his obviously terrified fiancée, Thomas simply sat up in bed and leant on his elbow, not even attempting to pick up his own wand which lay within reach on the bedside table next to him. "What are you going to do with the wand, Mione? I suppose you could stupefy me again but you should know before you try it that the wards are still not tied to you, and that we have a guest staying."

"Who?" Mione wondered why Thomas had found it necessary to tell her about the guest.

"Bill Weasley." Thomas watched recognition cross Mione's face. "He extended the wards to over five miles for me this afternoon."

Mione knew that she couldn't swim that far. Having little choice, she swallowed and decided to do what she couldn't earlier that day. "Avada... Avada...Avada..." She let out a scream of frustration as she couldn't complete the curse.

Thomas slid across the bed. "You can't do it, can you?"

Mione went to back away, only for Thomas to wrap his hand around her wrist. "Let go of me."

"I'm not going to hurt you, not even after the stunt you pulled this morning. I'd just rather you didn't have this in your hand." Thomas assured her, before gently prying the wand out of her fingers and throwing it across the room. "So now we've got rid of that, perhaps you might like to consider having the conversation we should have had this morning. It would have been far more productive than my having to portkey across the Atlantic twice to get you back from Rupert Giles, especially as you know how much I hate portkeying."

Mione was frightened at what Thomas might have done to the Watcher. "Did you hurt him?"

"No." Thomas told her. "In actual fact, he couldn't have been more helpful."

"He told you where to find me?" Mione had expected to find Remus home when she portkeyed into the house absolutely exhausted from her swim to get past the wards. In tears and freezing cold, Mione hadn't been able to warm herself up with a spell as her teeth had also been chattering too hard to speak coherently, let alone hold her wand properly. As she'd tried to explain about Thomas, Rupert had wrapped her in a blanket, lit a fire and fixed her a hot chocolate, which she now suspected had been drugged.

"Not exactly." Thomas didn't bother to explain about Atropos. "Why did you run, Mione?"

Mione looked at him in amazement. "You're Voldemort; why do you think I ran? I was frightened, especially after I'd stunned you the way I did."

"I admit I was angry when I came to, but I still wouldn't have hurt you." Thomas didn't tell her about the unfortunate house-elf's fate.

"I find that hard to believe." Mione wished she could stop shaking as she fought to hold back her tears. "I know what you've done to people for doing far less than that."

Thomas knew that they weren't going to be able to talk while Mione was in the condition she was. He therefore reached over to the

bedside table and picked up a vial he'd brought in earlier. "This is just a very mild calming potion."

Mione reluctantly took the vial from him. "How do I know it's what you say it is?"

Thomas frowned. "Mione, if I wanted you dead, you wouldn't have even woken up this evening."

Mione acknowledged the truth behind his comment, and uncorked the vial before sniffing it. "It smells like calming potion."

"Please just drink it." Thomas implored.

Mione knocked back the contents of the vial, feeling the results of the potion within moments. Thomas took the empty vial from her and dropped it back onto the bedside table. "You're right about your comment that I've done far worse to others but you should know that your position is somewhat different as my fiancée. I love you and have no wish to harm you."

Now that she could think clearly without fear clouding her mind, Mione immediately thought about Selena Gregory, and what Thomas was supposed to have done to her. "Is that what you told Selena Gregory? That you'd never hurt her? You were supposed to have loved her, weren't you?"

Thomas wasn't surprised that Mione had known about his former lover. "So you've heard of what I was alleged to have done to her?"

"Yes." Mione didn't see any point in lying as she'd brought the subject up. "The rumors were that you found her in bed with someone else and that you killed them both."

"The rumors are correct." Thomas confirmed what everyone had suspected. "I was meant to be away for several days but I came home early where I found her in my bed with one of my followers. I killed him instantly but I made her pay for betraying me."

"And do you regret it?" Despite asking, Mione had a dreadful feeling that she already knew the answer.

"No, and I'd do the same again in the same situation." Thomas answered bluntly. "Selena knew what would happen to her if she betrayed my trust. At the start of our relationship when I professed an interest in her, she declared that she'd never leave her husband for me. I respected that, but I wasn't willing to share her with anyone else."

Mione was intrigued by his answer. "Did her husband know?"

"Yes." Thomas knew that Selena had told Mack Jameson some time after they had got together. "But he allowed appearances to dictate their relationship. Mack could have divorced her but chose not to."

"Mack was obviously sleeping with Selena as well though, wasn't he?" The combination of the calming potion and Mione's own innate curiosity drove her on to continue questioning Thomas about his former lover.

"You mean because of Anna, don't you?" Thomas had wondered at first if Selena's daughter had been his child.

"Yes." Mione revealed that she knew exactly who Anna had been. "She could have been your daughter."

"But she wasn't." Thomas had carried out a paternity test only to find it negative. "Unlike Seville."

"Alice was in love you with, wasn't she?" Mione found it a little off-putting talking about Thomas' old relationships but she wanted to find out as much as possible.

"Yes, but I never felt the same way about her." Thomas knew that Alice would have done anything for him. "Talking about Seville, do you know what happened to her?"

"No." Mione didn't quite meet his eyes as she answered.

Thomas gripped her chin. "I think you're being untruthful, and as I'm being honest with you, I expect the same from you."

"I'm sorry." Mione knew though that he wasn't going to like the answer. "To tell you, I need to tell you about my past."

Thomas decided that even though he was aware of most it, he wanted to know what happened after Mione had risked her life to try and save Severus. "So why don't you fill me in now? I'm pretty much au fait with what happened up to the pureblood duel you interfered in."

Mione told him about the outcome of the pureblood duel and the suspension spells. "Eventually, however, the spells broke down and I died."

Thomas' look was one of incredulity. "I thought we were going to be honest."

Mione scowled. "So you think I survived, and for the fun of it I simply jumped through the veil?"

Thomas accepted she had a valid point. "So what happened?"

Mione knew that no matter what she told him she had to protect Harry and H.J., and met Thomas' eyes as she span lies and the truth together, hoping he'd believe her. "After I died, I knew nothing until I found myself in the Death Chamber but this time it was all white. There were three women there, and they told me what had happened to me. I knew I must have died but I was shocked to find out that years had passed since my death. After telling me, they offered me a choice, pass on or come after you." Mione gave a bitter laugh. "Obviously I wasn't going to refuse as I didn't want to pass on. I was only twenty."

Thomas looked contemplatively at Mione. "I can understand that. So if you're dead, why aren't you incorporeal?"

"Even though I'm effectively dead, I can exist in solid form in this world." Mione wondered if he knew that ghosts didn't exist in this world.

"But you're breathing." Thomas ran his fingers down the side of Mione's face until his hand came to rest on her neck. "And you feel warm."

Mione couldn't hide her shiver at his touch. "It's a glamour. I wear a ring that maintains it."

"Take it off." Thomas ordered.

Mione tried to slide the ring off her finger only for nothing to happen. "I can't get it off."

Thomas could see the ring and that Mione was honestly trying to remove it. "Forget it about for the moment. I want to know about my daughter."

Mione took a depth breath. "As I'd been married to him, when I was in the Chamber I asked what had happened to Harry Lupin, and I found out that he'd married Seville some years after I died."

Thomas easily deduced what Mione was avoiding telling him. "If she married Lupin, then she betrayed me, didn't she?"

"Yes." Mione nodded. "Lachesis also told me that Seville considered Remus Lupin her father as he took her in after you passed through the veil."

Thomas wasn't entirely happy with the answer and it showed on his face. "It seems that everyone I care about ends up betraying me."

"Sirius never did." Mione pointed out.

"No, he didn't." Thomas acknowledged. "And despite the fact that you fled, so far neither have you."

“And what would happen if I were ever to betray you as Selena did?” Mione felt afraid to ask but she had to know.

Thomas caressed Mione’s face as he spoke. “My feelings, as they were for Selena, fade into insignificance compared to how I feel about you. I mean it when I say I wouldn’t hurt you but I don’t recommend that you to put it to the test by following in her footsteps.”

Mione felt her blood run cold, and she didn’t take the subject any further. “So what happens now? I know you can’t simply just let me go.”

“First of all, I want you to swear an oath that you’ll tell no-one who I once was.” Thomas handed over his wand so that Mione could use it.

Even though he’d said he loved her and wouldn’t hurt her, Mione was still apprehensive about what Thomas would do if she refused, so she took the wand from him. “I swear on my life and my magic that I won’t tell anyone you were once Voldemort.”

Thomas was surprised when Mione didn’t bat so much as an eyelid. “That doesn’t hurt?”

“No.” Mione let go of the wand when Thomas took it back. “Being dead must negate the pain.”

Thomas wondered how Mione had coped once she’d arrived. “So you accepted the Fates’ offer. How did you end up at Hogwarts?”

“Atropos’ sister, Lachesis, told me I would find a wand and money in my possession on my arrival. She also told me about Harry and H.J. Sebastian.” Mione tried to keep her voice level as she lied.

“So do Harry and H.J. know who you really are?” Thomas needed to know if the man who’d refused to join him was part of a bigger picture.

“No.” Mione denied it, making sure she didn’t break eye contact with him. “Using the information Lachesis had provided me with, I cornered Harry first and then H.J. and gave them false memories of me.”

"You made Harry think he was dating you?" Thomas asked.

"Yes. He believes he only came to England to be with me as we wanted to be together." Mione continued to mix truth and lies in order to be convincing.

Mione's words tied in with what Remus had told him when he'd first met Harry. "That's awfully ruthless of you, Mione."

"I didn't hurt them." Mione looked away as she said it.

"That's not what Remus said about Harry." Thomas gently held Mione's chin so that he could look at her. "He told me that Harry was devastated when you began seeing me."

"Harry and I were already over." Mione pointed out.

"Were you in love with him?" Thomas asked the question he found bothered him the most.

"No." Mione answered truthfully as although she loved Harry, she knew that her feelings for him had changed from being in love as she had been when she'd been married to him, to a more gentle love based on friendship alone. "Which is why I think things went wrong when we tried sleeping together."

"I'm glad you didn't." Thomas admitted. "I don't like the thought of any other man touching you."

Mione didn't like the possessive tone that colored Thomas' voice. "I'm not your property."

"I don't recall saying you were but as my wife, after Saturday that's exactly what you'll be considered." Thomas pointed out.

Mione remembered the vows she was supposed to make at their upcoming wedding, and Thomas assuring her that he'd never invoke them. "You can't honestly expect me to marry you now."

"I'm not letting you go, Mione. In fact, I think your hand is missing something." Thomas reached out and picked Mione's engagement ring up from the bedside table behind her.

"I don't want it." Mione tried to pull her hand free as Thomas firmly grasped it before slipping the ring on.

Thomas watched her tug at the ring. "It won't come off. Only I can take it off now. Call it insurance in case you decide to disappear on me again."

"Why?" Mione gave up trying to remove the ring. "I don't love you."

"If that's the case, then why couldn't you kill me, Mione?" Thomas wrapped his arm around Mione's waist.

Mione pushed against his chest trying to free herself but to no avail. "I don't know."

"I think you do." Thomas used his other hand to cup the back of her neck, tilting her head upwards. "Don't you?"

Mione tried to turn her head aside but Thomas' hand held it steady. "No."

"I know why you couldn't do it. It's because despite knowing who I once was, you still love me, don't you?" Thomas watched desolation fill Mione's eyes. "If you could have done it, then you'd have done it yesterday when I was at your mercy on the beach."

"I didn't even think about it. I just wanted to get away." Mione could hear the panic in her voice as the calming potion began to wear off.

"Liar." The softly spoken word sounded more like a caress than an accusation as Thomas bent his head to brush his lips across Mione's exposed throat.

Holding herself rigid, Mione tried to ignore the sensations Thomas was invoking. "Please don't do that."

Thomas ignored Mione and continued to kiss her throat until Mione gave a small whimper. As she did, Thomas removed his hand from the back of her neck to slide it under the sheet until it covered her breast. Thomas smiled victoriously as Mione's nipple hardened immediately. "It doesn't feel as if you want me to stop."

Mione felt dismayed by her body's betrayal. "Just because you can drag a reaction out of me, doesn't mean that I want you or that I love you. I hate you."

"You hate the Voldemort you knew, yes. But I know you love me, otherwise you'd have followed through with your curse." Thomas ran his thumb roughly over Mione's nipple, making Mione gasp. "I could make love to you now, and I know you'd willingly give yourself to me."

Mione didn't want to face the truth of Thomas' words, and denied his statement. "Didn't you hear me? I don't want you and I don't love you. I just want you to leave me alone."

Thomas stared at Mione. "Convince me that you don't love me, and I give you my word that I'll let you go."

Unable to look at him, Mione glanced away. "I... I don't love you."

"You're not terribly persuasive." Thomas lowered his head and briefly brushed his lips over Mione's. "Your mouth says one thing but your eyes tell me another." Mione was appalled to feel her body beginning to respond to him and almost against her will she relaxed against him. As Thomas felt her capitulate he increased the pressure on her lips, and as his tongue swept across her bottom lip, Mione opened her mouth to him allowing him to deepen the kiss.

Thomas ended the kiss a few minutes later. "You do still love me, don't you?"

Mione struggled with herself. "No. Now please let me go."

Thomas softly kissed her neck before whispering in her ear. "Try it a little more convincingly, like this. Mione, I love you."

Thomas' words sounded heartfelt, and suddenly unable to deal with how she truly felt about the man holding her, Mione ripped free from his grasp, and moved to the very edge of the bed.

"Mione, come here." Thomas held out his hand.

Mione frantically shook her head but didn't make any further attempt to move as Thomas reached over and easily pulled her back across the bed until she lay looking up at him. Not able to meet his eyes, Mione closed her own as Thomas cupped her face, and kissed her. Again, Mione made no attempt to resist him, instead as the kiss deepened, unconsciously wrapping her arms around his neck. Thomas released her mouth to ask one final time. "You do love me, don't you?"

Mione felt tears threatening as she finally owned up to her true feelings. "Yes, but I don't want this."

"I don't believe you." Thomas stroked her hair.

Mione looked up at him as he leaned on his elbow. "Why are you doing this?"

Thomas trailed his fingers across her breasts where they rose and fell just above where the sheet covered them. "Because I love you, and despite what's happened I still want to marry you."

Mione could already feel her body reacting to Thomas' light touch. "I can't marry you, Thomas."

Thomas knew differently. "Stop fighting this, Mione."

"I can't." Mione tried to ignore the shivers that ran down her spine as Thomas moved the sheet down to her waist. "Knowing who you are changes everything."

Cupping her breast and brushing his thumb across her nipple, Thomas brought his mouth down to join it, making Mione cry out, before raising his head to look at her. "It changes nothing. This

Saturday you will marry me, and as a pureblood, you know there can be no divorce between us after that.”

“But you’re not a pureblood.” Mione used words as her weapon, flinching as a hard look crossed Thomas’ face.

“You’re forgetting, Thomas Seville is a pureblood and this is his body.” Thomas informed her.

“What are you trying to say?” Mione forced herself to concentrate as Thomas’ hand returned to her breast.

“You don’t think I created a family, a fortune and a history, do you?” Thomas continued with his ministrations as he spoke. “Thomas Seville was a bona fide citizen with a family.”

“How?” Mione stifled the moan that threatened to spill from her lips as Thomas easily coaxed a response from her.

“Have you heard of the Verto Corpus?” Thomas knew from Mione’s expression that she had.

“It’s a mythical artifact that is rumored to allow someone to exchange souls.” Mione recited what she’d remembered reading, trying to ignore Thomas’ hand as it slipped beneath the sheet.

“Except that it’s not mythical.” Thomas had searched long and hard for it since he’d first discovered its possible existence. “The person who had it didn’t even know what it was.”

“The real Thomas Seville had it, didn’t he?” Mione jumped as Thomas trailed his fingers across the sensitive skin of her stomach.

“Yes.” Thomas had been elated to find it. “I originally intended to use it to take Regulus Black’s place until I realized how much better placed Thomas Seville was. He was single, spectacularly wealthy, and most importantly blemish free. If I’d taken Black’s place, I’d have had to put up with his wife, and if she’s anything like the Petra I knew, I most definitely made the better choice.”

Mione ignored the comment about Petra Black. "So you swapped bodies with Seville before murdering him?" Mione grabbed Thomas' hand before it went lower than her stomach. "Please stop doing that."

"Do you really want me to stop?" When Mione didn't answer the question, Thomas pulled his hand free and let it trail lower, before answering Mione's question. "I didn't murder him but I did have to access his memories, something he wasn't entirely co-operative with."

"So where is he now?" Mione moaned as Thomas lightly caressed her hip.

"He's in a Muggle institution." Thomas then explained why he hadn't simply killed the man whose body he'd stolen. "At the time I didn't know enough about the artifact to take the chance of killing him."

"And now?" Mione could barely think as Thomas' fingers slipped into the warmth between her legs as she instinctively shifted her position to allow him access.

"I could kill him if I wanted to but I don't see the need." Thomas shrugged. "He's a complete shell of his former self and has no memories, let alone any idea of who he is. He's no threat to me."

"But I am." To Mione her words sounded breathless as she arched into his hand.

Thomas softly kissed the edge of her mouth. "No, you're not. As my wife, you won't be able to touch me, especially if I invoke those vows."

"You can't really want to marry me. You're Voldemort; you know nothing about love." Even as she acknowledged who he was, Mione still found herself wanting Thomas to kiss her, her lips parting slightly as Thomas placed more small kisses across her mouth.

Thomas denied Mione's accusation. "You may think me a monster but I'm still a man and I still have feelings like anyone else."

"But you know who I really am now." Mione tried to argue. "I'm a traitor's daughter."

"It still doesn't change the way I feel about you." Thomas pointed out. "And I could have lied to you, Mione. I could have hidden who I once was, and you'd have never known."

"So why did you tell me?" Mione hadn't thought about it until he'd pointed it out.

"Because I don't want to lie to you." Thomas dropped his head to bury his mouth in the crook of Mione's neck, feeling her pulse quickening under his lips. "Atropos has already told me I'm destined to lead this world and I want you by my side when I do, Mione."

Mione pushed against Thomas' chest forcing him up. "You can't really think I'm going to stand aside and simply let you try and take over."

"You're not going to have any choice in the matter." Thomas moved Mione's arms one by one so that they were wrapped around his neck as he moved so that he was lying above her. "I won't allow you to interfere."

"You can't stop me." Mione knew, however, that her words were just that, words.

"Mione, I don't need to stop you. Your feelings have already done the job for me." Thomas quite rightly pointed out as he looked down at his fiancée. "You've had two opportunities to kill me, and you've failed both times."

"Something I regret." Mione answered, half-truthfully. "I stupidly let my feelings get in the way of what I was supposed to do."

Thomas brushed Mione's hair out of her face so that he could look properly at her. "Something I'm extremely grateful for."

"Perhaps I should take lessons from you." Mione replied tartly.

"You know you haven't got it in you." Thomas reminded her as he moved down the bed in order to kiss Mione's breast.

"Unlike you." Mione's words came out breathlessly as Thomas' tongue laved her nipple, coaxing it into a hard bud which he then suckled on softly, making her cry out.

"Unlike me." Thomas kissed his way back up to Mione's neck and to her mouth.

Mione couldn't respond as Thomas kissed her again and again until she was clinging to him as she always did when they made love.

Thomas finally raised his head. "I want to make love to you, Mione."

Mione desperately wanted him to but knew that she wouldn't be able to live with herself if she took that final step. "I can't let you, Thomas."

Thomas stroked her face. "Mione, you do know that I love you, don't you?"

The potion finally having worked its way out of her system, Mione burst into tears. "It's not enough, Thomas. As much as I want to, I can't forget who you really are. And despite knowing that, you make me feel something I something I don't want to feel, and I hate you for it. I really hate you."

Thomas could feel her shaking. "And yet despite your claim to hate me, you told me you loved me."

Mione's voice trembled as she faced the truth about her feelings for him as she answered honestly. "I do love you but I can't let myself pretend that you're two different people when I know that you're not. I've got to face up to the fact that you're a man I hate as well as a man I love."

Thomas could hear the self-loathing in Mione's voice. "Mione..."

Mione cut him off. "I don't care what you do to me but I can't live like this, Thomas. It's over." Mione pulled free of him and edged across the bed.

Thomas knew that Mione meant every word and he reached over to grab his wand. "I'm sorry it's come to this."

"So am I." Mione closed her eyes.

Thomas knew what Mione expected him to do; what he would have done to anyone else but her. He could see her shaking as he aimed the wand, and spoke the one word that would wash away their entire conversation, and her knowledge of who he was. "Obliviate."

The Next Morning

Mione woke up to find Thomas sitting in a chair watching her. "Thomas?"

"Good morning." Thomas stood up and walked over to the bed. "How are you feeling?"

"Much better now." Mione sat up. "My headache seems to have gone."

"Well you pretty much slept for most of yesterday and through the night." Thomas informed her. "Your color looks much better."

"I think it must have been stress." Mione reached out to pour some water from the carafe that stood on the table at the side of the bed. "I've been worrying about the potions I need to brew for the adoption and blood heir rituals, as well as what's left to get done before Saturday."

Thomas sat down beside her. "Well you can stop worrying about the potions as I thought I'd save you the bother of making them, and brewed them myself." Mione was about to answer when he continued speaking. "I had a bit of an accident though as I knocked over the inkwell on the parchment for the adoption ritual. Only your name, mine and the children's are visible."

Mione realized that Thomas obviously hadn't seen her other name as he didn't mention it. "Did the ritual still work?"

Thomas handed over the ink stained parchment. "Yes."

Mione unfolded it to find her and Thomas' names as well as the name of the babies listed. "Thank goodness."

Thomas smiled. "Now do I get a good morning kiss?"

"Let me just brush my teeth first." Mione went to climb out of bed, only to feel a whoosh of a breath cleansing charm. "Thank you."

"The blood heir potion is completed, and without any mishaps you'll be pleased to hear. We just need to do the ritual after the wedding ceremony." Thomas bent over and kissed Mione. "Unless of course you've changed your mind about marrying me."

Mione pulled his head back down. "Absolutely not."

Next Chapter: Luna's hopes are finally realized; Hermione is attacked; Draco finds out that he's bitten off more than he can chew.

Chapter 20: Draco's Mistake

21st August 2003

Thomas and Mione were waiting in the foyer of his parents' home for the new arrivals as they portkeyed in from Los Angeles. "I'm glad you made it safely."

Mione had her arm around Thomas' waist. "Thomas, you already know Cassandra, Katherine and Cammie. This is Luna Lovegood."

Cammie grinned at Thomas. "Hi Uncle Thomas."

"Hello, Cammie." Thomas smiled back at the young girl. "You look excited."

"I am." Cammie was looking forward to being the flower girl at the couple's wedding.

Luna shook hands with Thomas. "It's really kind of you to invite us to stay like this."

"I knew Mione wanted her friends with her for her last few days of freedom." Thomas led the way out to the verandah. "I thought you might like some refreshments before you retire to your rooms. My parents and brother, Alex, will be joining us shortly."

After Thomas' family joined them, the group chatted amongst themselves until the girls began to flag. Thomas noticed and stood up. "I'll show you to your rooms now."

The group followed Thomas as he led the way up a large ornate staircase before taking them to the rooms that they'd been allocated. "Cassandra, you're going to be sharing with Cammie. Luna, you and Katherine have the room next door."

Luna followed Katherine into the bedroom and closed the door behind her before blurting out what was uppermost on her mind. "I don't think I like him."

Katherine frowned. "Why ever not?"

"I don't know." Luna rubbed her arms up and down. "There's just something about him that chills me."

"Do you think that maybe you're being influenced because we all thought he was the Voldemort that Mione and the others were looking for?" Katherine had finally met Thomas at dinner a few weeks earlier and really liked him.

Luna sighed. "Perhaps."

"You can't say anything to Mione." Katherine warned Luna. "She'll only get upset."

"Which is why I waited until we were alone to mention it." Luna smiled wryly. "I have to admit though, I'm tired and I hate portkey travel, so that might be affecting my judgment."

"At least you weren't sick." Katherine grinned. Cassandra had been sick to her stomach after their portkey journey to Los Angeles until she'd given her an anti-nausea potion.

Luna smiled back. "At least we can fly home."

"I'm rather looking forward to it." Katherine, like Cassandra and Luna, had never flown before. "Then again I doubt I'd feel the same way if we were returning by a Muggle commercial flight. Xander said that they're horrible."

Luna gave a little sigh as she thought about Xander. "I can't believe he asked if he could be my partner for the wedding."

"You think he's the one, don't you?" Katherine knew that Luna had had a thing for Harry but nothing like she had for Xander.

"He is." Luna yawned. "I just need to convince him of that fact. But right now I really need to shower and sleep or sleep and shower."

“Sleep first.” Katherine lay down on one of the oversized twin beds. “I hope someone wakes us up tomorrow otherwise I doubt I’ll get up at all.”

Luna lay back in her bed but sleep eluded her as she thought about Xander.

One week earlier

Xander sat in H.J.’s house watching TV. “Is Harry still refusing to go to the wedding?”

H.J. nodded. “He doesn’t think it’s in good taste. Personally, I don’t think he can stand watching Mione marry someone else.”

“It must be hard.” Xander acknowledged. “I know I wouldn’t want to do it, but I thought he and Tonks were getting along well.”

H.J. glanced up at the ceiling. “They are. They’ve been seeing each other whenever they can but they rarely move outside the bedroom.”

Xander sighed. “Lucky bastard.”

“Relationships aren’t just about sex, Xander.” H.J. castigated his friend. “They need some sort of substance to build on.”

“I know they’re not.” Xander, for all of his jokes about it, wanted more than that. “But sex or no sex, none of mine seem to work out. I appear to have a thing for the wrong kind of girl, or when I do pick the right kind of girl, I screw it up big time.”

“I take it you mean Anya.” H.J. was aware of the former demon who’d died.

“The one and only.” Xander no longer blamed himself for her death but he wished she’d found peace another way.

“I know a girl who isn’t a demon and who might be the right girl for you.” H.J. changed the channel as the program they’d been watching ended.

“As long as it’s not Remus’ secretary.” Xander had met the girl on several occasions, and had found her overbearing.

“It’s not.” H.J. grinned. “It’s Luna.”

“I don’t know.” Xander was a little dubious about the blonde girl. “I really do like her but she’s the kind of girl you treat with respect. You certainly don’t get to spend your time with her like Harry spends his with Tonks.”

H.J. switched off the television so that he could talk seriously with Xander. “Is that what you’re really looking for?”

Xander shook his head. “No, but I’m not sure if I’m looking for anything serious either.”

“You can’t let your mistake with Anya color your decisions.” H.J. decided to open up to Xander. “I let myself do that with my Luna, when I could have moved on. Herms deserved a whole lot more of me than I gave her.”

“Were you in love with her?” Xander had heard H.J. deny it before.

“I loved her but I wasn’t in love with her.” H.J. answered honestly. “But that’s only because I didn’t let myself be. If I’d let Luna go, then yes, I know I’d have fallen in love with her.”

“And what about our Hermione? I know you like her.” Xander couldn’t resist wiggling his eyebrows. “I’ve seen you looking at her the way a starving man eyes a hot dog.”

“Thanks for that image.” H.J. had to laugh though. “To answer your question, yes I’m in love with her, but she doesn’t see me that way.”

“And I’m Donald Duck.” Xander had seen the furtive glances Hermione was always sending H.J.’s way when she’d thought no-one could see. “She’s got it bad.”

H.J. frowned. “You really think so?”

"Duh! I thought I was the one with eye patch." Xander couldn't believe the two of them were so blind as to how the other one felt. "She's always watching you, H.J."

"I thought she liked Harry." H.J. admitted. "Even though she denied it when I asked her."

"Harry's a friend, H.J." Xander had never once seen Hermione look at Harry the same way she looked at H.J. "She doesn't treat him any differently than she treats me."

"I don't know." H.J. still wasn't sure. "Everything is going so well at the moment, and I don't want to mess our friendship up."

"Yet you expect me to do the same with Luna." Xander pointed out.

"Be honest with me." H.J. leant forward. "Do you like Luna at all?"

"Yes." Xander admitted reluctantly. "She's offbeat, and a little insane I think, but she makes me laugh."

"What else?" H.J. pushed his friend.

"She's got a great sense of humor. We can talk for hours about stupid things, and she doesn't laugh at what I like." Xander gave a rueful smile. "She even listens when I talk about the latest comic I've read even though she has no idea what I'm talking about."

"Why don't you give it a chance?" H.J. prompted. "Ask her to be your date to Mione's wedding."

"But as a bridesmaid, doesn't she already have one?" Xander wasn't quite sure how Australian wizarding weddings were structured.

"No, they do it a little differently than you do in America, and in case you didn't realize, they're having a private wizarding ceremony with just family there before the main wedding which is actually going to be a Muggle wedding." H.J. informed him. "Thomas is having his brother as his best man but apart from the ushers, there won't be any

groomsmen; just Cassandra, Katherine and Luna as bridesmaids together with Thomas' cousin Chastity. And, of course, Remus who's stepping in to give Mione away."

Xander frowned as he noticed someone missing from the list. "What about Cammie?"

"She's the flower girl, and ring bearer." H.J.'s daughter had been beyond excited when she'd found out.

"So you think I should ask Luna?" Xander was quite excited at the idea of visiting Australia and he knew that he'd enjoy escorting the blonde girl on a few day trips as she'd put a spin on them like no-one else could.

"Only if you really want to." H.J. didn't want it to be his decision.

Xander got up. "Is there any chance you could apparate me to Hogsmeade?"

"You're going to do it now?" H.J. looked pointedly at the clock. "It's almost midnight."

Xander hadn't noticed the time. "Perhaps I'd better wait until tomorrow."

H.J. grinned. "Perhaps you'd better. I'll apparate you there tomorrow morning."

The Next Day

Xander stood nervously at the front door and knocked. A woman he'd not met before answered it. Xander guessed it must be Luna's mother. "Hello Mrs. Lovegood. I'm Xander Harris. I was wondering if Luna was in."

Lavinia Lovegood smiled at the anxious looking young man. "Come in Xander. She's spoken about you on more than one occasion."

Xander followed Lavinia into the sitting room where Luna was reading.
“Greetings.”

Luna’s face lit up as she saw who’d spoken. “Xander.”

“I’ll leave you two alone.” Lavinia disappeared out of the sitting room.

“I hope you don’t mind me just dropping in like this.” Xander could feel sweat starting to affect the palms of his hands.

“Do you want something to eat or drink?” Luna asked politely.

“Err, no thanks.” Xander refused just as politely. “I’ve just eaten.”

“I’ve never known you to refuse food before.” Luna tilted her head to look more closely at Xander. “Are you alright?”

Xander thought of the first excuse that came into his head. “I can’t say that apparition is my favorite way to travel.”

“It’s like that for a lot of people, including me.” Luna sympathized with him. “So what do you want to do?”

“Pardon?” Xander knew he was acting totally out of character but his nerves were definitely getting the better of him.

“Do you want to go for a walk or sit and talk?” Luna was a little at a loss to explain Xander’s behavior.

“Talking is good.” Xander sat down on the chair opposite and then said absolutely nothing.

“Xander, what’s wrong?” Luna had never seen him so nervous before. “If something’s bothering you, just spit it out.”

“I was wondering if you’d like to be my date at Mione’s wedding.” Xander rushed to get the words out before he could change his mind about asking.

"A real date?" Luna's voice was tremulous as she asked, almost as if she couldn't believe what she was hearing.

Xander immediately did an about face. "It doesn't have to be if you don't want it to be. We could just go as friendly dates on a friend's date, you know as friends." Xander groaned at himself. "You know what I mean."

Luna blushed. "I do but I'd like to try it as a date date, if you know what I mean."

"I do." Xander suddenly got up. "Now we've got that sorted, I'd best be off."

"You can stay if you want to." Luna offered.

"I've things to do." Xander started backing towards the door. "I'll see you at the wedding then."

"Okay." Luna watched as Xander almost ran from the house before hugging herself.

Lavinia came back into the room. "So he's the one?"

"Yes." Luna responded resolutely. "He just needs a little encouragement."

"Are you sure?" Lavinia sat down by her daughter.

"Definitely." Luna assured her mother. "I know in the same way you knew about Daddy."

"You do know that there can still be more than one person for you, don't you?" Lavinia wanted to make sure her daughter was very certain about her feelings for Xander.

"But you've never moved on since Daddy died." Luna reminded her mother.

"That's because the only other person I could have fallen for has never shown an interest." Lavinia could see she'd surprised her daughter. "If he had, then I might well have taken a chance and moved on."

"Who is it?" Luna asked excitedly.

Lavinia refused to tell her daughter. "I'll tell you if anything ever comes of it."

Luna frowned. "Why not now?"

"Because I don't want you to interfere." Lavinia said cryptically before changing the subject. "Have you finished packing yet?"

"No. I still haven't picked out my shoes." Luna knew that the conversation was over but she couldn't help but wonder who her mother harbored feelings for.

"Let's go choose some now." Lavinia followed her daughter out of the sitting room and up to her bedroom.

23rd August 2003

By the time the morning of the wedding dawned, Luna had changed her opinion of Thomas entirely. Thomas had been kind and attentive to all of the girls, especially his future wife. As Luna sat painting her toenails she sighed. "Do you think Xander will treat me like Thomas treats Mione?"

Katherine threw a pillow at her. "You're not even been on a real date with him."

"That's only because Xander refused to see what was in front of him until now." Luna cast a spell to dry the varnish on her nails and got up from the bed. "I'm hoping he'll see me a little differently today."

Katherine picked up the ink blue dress that Luna was going to be wearing. "If he doesn't see you differently in this, then there's something wrong with him."

Luna knew that the dress was quite demure compared to her friends' dresses but the cut and color suited her perfectly. "I've never worn a Muggle dress before."

"Well I think this one was created with you in mind." Katherine could see that Luna was a little anxious despite her confidence that Xander was the one. "If he doesn't love you in it, then he's either blind or stupid." Katherine then remembered about Xander's eye. "Forget I said that."

Luna knew what Katherine was trying to say and hugged her friend. "Thanks. And I'm sure Orion will think you look wonderful in your dress too. Now we'd better get a move on, otherwise we're going to be late."

In Mione's bedroom, Cassandra was helping her friend to get ready. "Do you think I'll actually meet anyone today?"

"Probably a bunch of stuffed shirt purebloods." Mione had met some of Thomas' family's wizarding friends, and while his family was really nice, she knew she couldn't say the same for all of his friends. "I do know one eligible single young man who's attending."

Cassandra finished buttoning up the gown that Mione was wearing. "Is he nice?"

"It depends on how you view Malfoy." Mione wasn't able to resist teasing her friend.

"You're kidding, right?" Cassandra started to thread white flowers into Mione's hair.

"Sadly no." Mione had been dismayed to find out who some of the guests were. "You know very well that as a pureblood Thomas has to invite the Malfoys. Thankfully the distance put paid to a lot of the invitees attending including the Snapes and Harry Potter."

After Mione's teasing, Cassandra was struck by a horrible thought. "Please don't tell me you've partnered me with Malfoy."

Mione shook her head. "Actually you're sitting between Thomas' brother Alex and H.J. I've put Hermione on the other side of H.J., and Cammie next to her."

Cassandra let out the breath she'd been holding. "Thank goodness. I was worried for a moment."

"You do still like H.J., don't you?" Mione had deliberately put her friend next to him, believing she still liked him.

"I like him but not in a romantic sense anymore. I realized after leaving school, and getting to spend a little more time with him, Harry and Hermione, that I didn't like H.J. in the way I thought I did." Cassandra knew now that her feelings for H.J. had been little more than a schoolgirl crush.

"So you've obviously transferred your affections elsewhere." Mione stood up. "So what do you think?"

"You look like an angel." Cassandra hugged her friend.

"You're not avoiding talking about who you like." Mione slipped on her shoes. "So spill."

"I've decided to keep my options open." Cassandra smirked at Mione. "You never know I meet a handsome millionaire of my own."

"He's a billionaire, Cassandra." Mione burst out laughing at Cassandra's face. "I only found out on the evening we portkeyed here when I read an Australian newspaper that Alex had left lying around. Thomas didn't tell me."

"I didn't realize." Cassandra was completely stunned. "Maybe I won't find a millionaire of my own then."

Mione suddenly realized who Cassandra liked. "Or perhaps you might find a billionaire's brother to sweep you off your feet."

Cassandra went red. "We can't all have the same luck you did."

"You're right I am lucky." Mione picked up the flowers that Thomas had sent over for her. "And I think it's time this lucky lady got married."

Three hours later

Mione stood in the ante-chamber just off from the ballroom. "Are you ready to do this?"

"Do you want to hold Nathaniel?" Thomas didn't wait for an answer and handed over their son to his wife. "I need to get everything ready."

Mione took the sleeping baby. "I'm glad that he's so big. I'd have been frightened to hold him otherwise." Nathaniel and his sister, Madison, had been born two weeks earlier, but the day before the wedding was the first time Mione had seen them both as they'd been kept in the Auckland Magical Maladies Institute in New Zealand until they'd both put on some weight and were able to breathe on their own.

"I think magic has a lot to do with it. I don't think Muggle babies would have done so well." Thomas laid out the blank sheet of parchment paper, a long tapered knife and the potion on the table in front of them, as well as a large soft padded blanket. "I'm ready."

Mione carefully deposited Nathaniel on the blanket. "I'm not looking forward to this part."

Thomas picked up the knife. "Neither am I. As soon as I've taken the blood from both of us, you can heal his cut."

Mione held out her wand ready. "Okay."

Thomas sliced open his own finger first, before swiftly repeating the action on his son's finger. Nathaniel let his new parents know of his anger at the pain as he started to scream. Thomas hurriedly touched their fingers together before letting several drops of the mingled blood drop into the potion. He nodded at Mione who hurriedly healed

Nathaniel's finger. Thomas kept his hand on his son as he spoke the words of the blood heir ritual and then poured the potion onto the parchment. Words immediately appeared on the parchment affirming the ritual had worked. Thomas immediately scooped up his son and started to soothe him. "It's alright now."

Mione watched anxiously letting out a sigh of relief as Nathaniel almost instantly stopped fussing. "I can see he's going to be a Daddy's boy."

"I think he just wanted to be held." Thomas reassured his wife. "I expect he'll be just as good as for you."

"Do you think we should get back to the guests?" Mione glanced at the door.

Thomas smiled indulgently. "You want to get back to Madison, don't you?"

"Yes." Mione admitted. "I can't believe I almost didn't want them but I'm totally besotted with them after just one day. They're amazing."

"As is their mother." Thomas leant forward to kiss his wife, taking care not to crush his son. "Did I tell you how beautiful you look today?"

"You did but you can always say it again." Mione felt a wave of love for her husband so strong that it almost hurt. "I'm so very blessed to have you."

"I'm not going to argue with that." Thomas grinned. "Come on, let's go retrieve our daughter from my mother."

"If she'll actually give her up." Mione knew that like her, Rebecca was completely besotted with the two children.

Thomas opened the door. "In fact, I think it might be Dad you're going to be fighting off."

Mione glanced over to where Thomas was looking, to see Richard Seville cooing over his granddaughter. “Hardly the dyed-in-the-wool businessman we all know and love.”

Thomas laughed. “Why don’t you take Nathaniel over?”

Thomas watched as Mione walked over to his parents, quickly being deprived of her son as well. He turned as he sensed someone standing behind him. “Regulus.”

“Congratulations, Thomas.” Regulus held out his hand. “You’re a very lucky man. My wife saves looks like the one Mione gave you for other men.”

Thomas glanced over to where Petra Black was flirting with Lucius Malfoy. “Why is it that woman can’t keep it under control?”

Regulus shrugged. “I gave up caring years ago.”

“Can you spare five minutes?” Thomas started walking out of the ballroom, expecting Regulus to follow.

Regulus knew that it wasn’t a question, and followed his host. “What do you want to discuss?”

“Let’s go into the study.” Thomas opened the door to his father’s study before allowing Regulus in and closing it again. “Can I offer you something to drink?”

“Cognac if you have it.” Regulus sat down.

Thomas poured out a snifter of Cognac for Regulus and sat down behind the desk. “How are your searches progressing?”

“Nothing tangible yet, I’m afraid.” Regulus swirled the Cognac around in the glass. “But I do have several leads. I’ll let you know as soon as I can confirm anything. It’s a pity Sirius is so unapproachable. He’s actually far better placed than I am.”

"I'm well aware of that." Thomas decided that he'd have a drink after all. "And if we don't get anywhere soon, I may have to pay him a visit."

Regulus smirked. "I'd like to come along for that one."

"Of course." Thomas knew that Regulus would. "Try and avoid your cousin this time, though, won't you?"

"She shouldn't have even been there." Regulus pointed out. "And she opened fire on me first."

"But she thought she was defending Dumbledore." Thomas reminded him.

"She wouldn't be defending anything anymore if it hadn't been for that stupid bird." Regulus had sent the killing curse at his cousin, only for Dumbledore's phoenix to block its path.

"I'd like to try and turn her." Thomas had a soft spot for Bella. "She was once one of my loyalist servant's, apart from your brother that is."

Regulus shook his head. "Unless you'd shown me, I'd have found it hard to believe that I was such a traitor in your world, and Sirius such a loyalist or that such a world even existed."

"It exists alright but things are very different there." Thomas took a mouthful of the scotch he'd just poured.

"You're right about that as I know you didn't deal with Muggles there as you do here." Regulus had seen quite a few of Thomas' memories since Thomas had opened up to him a few months after he'd joined him.

"The Seville family deals with Muggles, and a lot of the wealth we have is derived from doing business with them, hence my having to deal with them." Thomas pointed out. "It's also the reason for the main wedding ceremony being of Muggle origin."

"How can you do it?" Regulus didn't particularly like interacting with Muggles.

"While I don't particularly relish dealing with Muggles, I actually enjoy the challenge of the work." Thomas admitted. "It's certainly better than just sitting around and being fawned all over."

Regulus was surprised at Thomas' answer. "I thought you enjoyed the attention."

"Not particularly." Thomas had thought he had until he'd lived without it. "Not unless it's from my wife."

"You really are in love with her, aren't you?" Regulus' own marriage, like Sirius' first one, had been arranged by his parents.

"Yes." Thomas didn't see any need to deny it. "I wouldn't have ever gotten married otherwise."

"Are you going to tell her about yourself?" Regulus took a small sip of the Cognac, enjoying the way it warmed his throat as it made its way down to his stomach.

"I already have." Thomas knew that he was going to shock Regulus with his next words. "Mione is actually from my world as well."

Regulus was totally stunned. "Why didn't you say before?"

"Because I only found out myself a few days ago." Thomas sighed. "Unfortunately she was sent here to stop me."

Regulus was confused. "But she married you."

"She also didn't know who I was until a few days ago. When she found out, she admitted she loved me but couldn't marry me." Thomas wished Mione had been better able to deal with it as he would have preferred to have been open with her. "So I had to obliviate her."

"And you're not bothered that you had to do that, are you?" Regulus knew Thomas was ruthless if he wanted something.

"Actually, yes I am." Thomas admitted. "But I can't give her up, so I'm just going to have to live with it."

"And if she finds out in the future?" Regulus asked.

"Then I'll deal with it." Thomas answered easily. "But she's married to me now, and it certainly makes thing a little more difficult for her to just up and leave, to say nothing of the children."

"Did you invoke the vows?" Regulus asked curiously.

"Just one of them." Thomas didn't tell him, however, which one it was. "Shall we head back?"

"I'll let you know if I find anything out." Regulus promised as he followed back out towards the ballroom.

Later that evening

Luna let Xander walk her out into the gardens. "It's beautiful out here."

Xander had to admit he'd been impressed by the estate. "It must be nice to have this much money."

"I don't care about the money." Luna slipped her hand into the crook of Xander's arm as they walked along the pathway which was lit by lanterns hanging from the trees. "But I would like to live somewhere like this. Think of all the creatures that must exist here."

Xander couldn't help but smile. "I'm surprised you're not out on a hunt for a Crumple-Horned Snick."

"It's Snorkack." Luna corrected him. "And they don't live here. I'm more likely to find a Laughing Kickleberry lurking in the bushes."

Xander glanced at the bushes. "Do they bite?"

“Only if you disturb their young.” Luna responded seriously. “So we’d better be careful where we step.”

After they’d put some distance between themselves and the building, Xander led her over to a bench that was covered in flowers and pulled her to sit down. “You truly are one of a kind, aren’t you?”

“I hope so.” Luna felt little butterflies in her stomach as Xander put his arm around her shoulder.

“I’ve really enjoyed spending today with you.” Xander had butterflies of his own as Luna put her arm around his waist. “I was thinking of going to see the Harbor Bridge tomorrow. Do you want to go with me?”

Luna couldn’t resist teasing him. “Is this a date date or a friends’ date?”

Xander grinned. “A date date.”

“If we can take a walk on the beach first, then I’d love to.” Luna could feel her heartbeat beginning to quicken as Xander wrapped his finger around one of the curls that framed her face.

“I think I’d like that.” Xander let go of the curl to cup Luna’s face. “As long as there isn’t anything nasty lurking beneath the sand.”

“Just Snapping Sandflies.” Luna closed her eyes as Xander touched her lips with his own.

Xander lightly kissed Luna, not wanting to take too much of a liberty with her as H.J. had warned him against rushing things with the young girl.

Luna liked the way Xander’s lips felt as he kissed her. As the kiss ended she smiled prettily at him. “I think I like date dates.”

“So do I.” Xander stood up and held out his hand. “Let’s walk back.” Just as they’d been about to leave, a muffled scream rent the air. “What the hell?”

“I think it came from that way.” Luna pointed towards the depths of the Eucalyptus grove.

“Do you have your wand with you?” Xander was wary about taking the girl along with him without it.

“No.” Luna shook her head. “I didn’t have anywhere to put it.”

“Let me take you back first then.” Xander wasn’t willing to risk Luna’s safety. “It’s probably just an animal but I’d rather you were safe.”

Luna felt warm inside at Xander’s concern for her. “Let’s hurry then. It might be injured.”

A few minutes earlier

Hermione stood in the gardens surrounding the house. Suddenly a voice interrupted her musings. “You’re in my way, Mudblood.”

Slowly turning, Hermione found herself face to face with Draco Malfoy. “Just leave me alone, Malfoy.” She went to step around him.

Draco stood in her way. “You really should be more careful, Granger. It’s dark out here. Who knows what might befall you.”

Hermione stiffened at his words. “If you’ll let me pass, then I’ll go back inside.”

“What’s wrong with spending a little time with me?” Draco grabbed Hermione’s arm.

Hermione tried to pull free. “Let go of me, Malfoy.”

“I think we should take a walk, get to know each other a little better.” Draco pulled Hermione along, deeper into the gardens.

Hermione tried digging her heels into the gravel pathway, only for Draco's strength to overwhelm her as he pulled her under the cover of a large Eucalyptus tree set back in a clearing just off the pathway. "I don't want to get to know you any better."

"Now that's a pity." Draco dragged Hermione forward until she was held tightly against him. "As I think I'd like to know you better." Draco moved his hand down to her bottom. "Well, parts of you anyway."

Hermione slapped him. "I'd rather sleep with a snake."

Draco slapped her back. "Keep your hands to yourself, bitch."

Hermione could taste blood from the cut that appeared on her lip. "Please, just get off me."

Draco shook his head. "Who'd have known that under those baggy robes you wore, you had a body like this."

Hermione was suddenly beginning to regret the Muggle style halterneck dress she'd worn to the wedding, and she began to struggle. "Let go of me."

"I like them feisty." Draco slid his hand into Hermione's hair, holding her head still so that he could kiss her.

Hermione promptly bit his lip earning her a backhander, the force of which knocked her to the floor. "You're not going to get away with this."

Draco knelt down over her. "You're not going to remember."

Aware of what he'd do to her if she didn't act soon, Hermione opened her mouth and screamed. Draco promptly covered her mouth with his hand. "A little less noise I think." He then looked into her terrified eyes. "We haven't got all night. Now we can do this the hard way or the easy way."

"Just what the hell do you think you are doing?" Mione, who'd been walking through the gardens to try and cool down after the heat of the

ballroom, had heard what sounded like a muffled scream nearby and had immediately gone over to investigate.

Malfoy scowled as he saw Mione. "Just forget what you saw, turn around and go back the way you came."

Mione looked incredulously at him. "You honestly expect me to walk away while you force your attentions on one of my guests?"

"She's a Mudblood." Draco pointed out. "And they're fair game."

Mione wasn't going to let Draco continue manhandling Hermione, and she roughly grabbed Draco's arm pulling him backwards off Hermione. "Get off her."

As Draco let go, Hermione immediately scrambled to her feet, tears running down her cheeks.

"Get out of this house. You're no longer welcome." Mione put her arm around Hermione.

Draco sneered at Mione, who he'd disliked ever since she taken over as Remus' teaching assistant, and faced with a chance to get back at her, he insulted her. "Who do you think you are touching me? Everyone knows you're nothing but a Colonial whore who sold herself to the highest bidder."

Mione let go of Hermione before slapping Draco hard across the face. "Get out."

Draco didn't hesitate and slapped Mione back, not noticing the shadow that had fallen to the side of him and was therefore completely caught unawares when a fist connected with his face.

Xander stood over Draco where he'd fallen. "Get up. I'm going to show you what happens to cowards like you."

Mione laid a hand on Xander's arm. "Don't, Xander. He's not worth it."

Xander left Draco where he was lying, and turned to his crying friend. "Hermione, are you alright?"

Hermione shook her head. "He was going to... going to..." She couldn't get her words out.

Xander felt his anger building at the wizard who lay at his feet. "You're scum, and you're going to apologize to Hermione and Mione, Malfoy. Otherwise I'm going to kick the shit out of you."

"You can go to hell. You're nothing but a worthless Muggle." Draco spat out the blood that was trickling down his face from his nose.

A noise from behind Xander alerted him to the fact that Luna must have told someone about the scream he'd gone to investigate. Thomas walked into the clearing, a tall man flanking him. "What's going on?"

Xander answered him. "I arrived just as he insulted Mione before slapping her, so I hit him. I also think he'd tried to force his attentions on Hermione. I've asked him to apologize but so far he's refused."

"We'll see about that." Thomas bit down on his anger as he turned to the man at his side. "Fetch Lucius Malfoy for me."

Draco sneered. "You really think my father is going to make me apologize for touching that?"

"We'll see, won't we?" Thomas waited until Lucius made his way over to the group.

"Thomas, your man told me you wanted to see me." Lucius ignored his son.

"Draco attacked Miss Granger here, and is refusing to apologize." Thomas said quietly. "He also insulted and attacked my wife."

Lucius paled. "Draco, you will do whatever is necessary to make it up to Miss Granger and Mrs. Seville."

"But..." Draco fell silent at the glare Lucius imposed upon his son. He then politely apologized to Mione before facing Hermione who was standing slightly to the side, and mouthed 'you're dead' before apologizing. "I apologize for my behavior, Miss Granger. It was just a bit of fun."

Even with the others there, Hermione was frightened by Draco's words, and not knowing what else to do, acknowledged his apology. "I accept your apology in that case."

Lucius bowed low. "I'm so very sorry you had to endure such disgusting behavior, Miss Granger. If there is anything I can do to make reparation please tell me."

"Thank you for your generous offer, Lord Malfoy, but an apology is sufficient." Hermione didn't truly believe Lucius but knew that etiquette demanded he make the offer.

Lucius turned to his son. "Get to your room and pack now. We will be leaving shortly."

Thomas stopped Draco from leaving. "If you ever lay a finger on my wife or Miss Granger or speak disrespectfully to either of them again, I swear I will kill you."

Draco didn't say anything and hurried away. Thomas turned to Lucius. "I would still like to speak to him before he leaves."

"I'll make sure Draco is in my room in ten minutes." Lucius bowed low and left.

Mione put her arm around Hermione who was trying to stem the tears that were still making their way down her cheeks. "I'm so very sorry you had to go through that at my wedding."

"It's not your fault." Hermione smiled waveringly at Mione. "Thank you for defending me like that." She then smiled at Xander. "And thank you for stepping in."

Xander wished he'd done worse to Malfoy when he had the chance. "I'm just glad I came along when I did."

"I'm extremely embarrassed that anyone would dare attack either of you." Thomas apologized. "Now, if you'll all excuse me, I want to join Lucius to try and persuade him to stay even though his son is no longer welcome. Mione, come with me?"

Suddenly H.J. burst into the clearing. "Hermione, are you alright? A man just came over and told me that you'd been hurt."

At H.J.'s concern, Hermione's trickle of tears became a flood, and she immediately moved into his arms as he held them out to her. "Malfoy, he... he..." Hermione couldn't get her words for tears.

Thomas could see the incensed look on H.J.'s face as he comforted Hermione. "I'm sorry, H.J. If I'd known something like this would happen, I'd have had security out here."

"You weren't to know, Thomas." H.J. rubbed soothing circles over Hermione's back, before turning to Xander. "Would you mind keeping an eye on Cammie for me? Luna's with her."

Xander nodded. "Of course I will. Just look after Hermione."

H.J. felt better knowing that his daughter would be well taken care of, and he turned back to Thomas. "Is it okay to apparate from here?"

"It is." Thomas addressed Hermione again. "Miss Granger, I am so sorry that Draco would dare to do this to you at my wedding."

Hermione looked up from H.J.'s shoulder. "Thank you." H.J. then apparated them both out of the clearing.

Thomas turned to Xander. "I appreciate your protecting my wife and Miss Granger."

"I just wish I'd done more to that piece of shit than broke his nose." Xander then remembered who he was speaking to. "I'm sorry but any man who does that to a woman deserves everything he gets."

Thomas knew that Xander wouldn't be so friendly towards him if he knew of his own past. "I'll be speaking to Draco momentarily, and I'll make sure he doesn't attempt it again. Please try and enjoy the rest of the night." He then bowed slightly, put his arm around Mione and, like H.J. had with Hermione, apparated them both out of the clearing.

A few minutes later, Hermione was being held by H.J. in her room as she calmed down enough to tell him what had happened to her. "I can't believe he'd dare to do that to me at a wedding."

"I'm going to kill the fucker." H.J.'s language surprised Hermione, and before she could do anything, he disappeared.

Narcissa Malfoy opened the door at the heavy banging coming from the other side. "Mr. Sebastian. What can I do for you?"

"I want your son." H.J. didn't bother with the niceties.

"I'm afraid you've just missed him." Narcissa informed H.J. "Can I give him a message?"

"You can tell that little bastard he's dead when I get him." With that, H.J. vanished.

Lucius waited for his wife to close the door before stepping out of their bedroom and speaking. "I think Draco may have bitten off more than he can chew with that one."

"He's obviously in love with the Mudblood." Narcissa sighed. "I just hope that it doesn't all end in tears. I can't deal with having to produce another heir."

Lucius knew how much Narcissa had hated how pregnancy had affected the way she'd looked. "I'm afraid it's out of my hands. Thomas is the wronged party here, and I have a feeling Sebastian isn't going to let the matter lie either."

"Make sure Draco knows that if he survives, he'll be relearning a few lessons he obviously didn't take to heart." Narcissa thought she'd

drilled them into him. "Perhaps you could also ask Thomas to speak to Sebastian about backing off if Thomas lets Draco live."

"I will." Lucius promised. "Why don't you wait in the bedroom?"

"I'll see you later." Narcissa left the sitting room.

H.J. apparated back into Hermione's bedroom to find a worried Hermione pacing the floor. "I'm sorry."

"Thank goodness." Hermione was relieved to see H.J. "I thought you might have done something terrible to him."

"He's already left." H.J. let out a breath. "I hate that little shit. He's always been full of his own importance, and thinks he can ride roughshod over everyone. I can't even ask you to report it as the Ministry of Magic don't have jurisdiction here."

Hermione was glad, as she knew she couldn't face having to go over what Malfoy had tried to do to her again. "Just forget about it, H.J. I'm alright now, and I don't think he'll try it again."

Not wanting to upset Hermione any further, H.J. decided to drop the subject. "Let me heal your face."

Hermione sat down as H.J. healed her cut lip, before smiling tremulously at him. "You can go back if you want to. I'll be fine now."

"I'm staying with you. Luna and Xander will take good care of Cammie." H.J. sat down on the sofa next to Hermione, before getting back up again as he thought of something that might help. "Let me get you something to drink. Brandy's good for shock."

Hermione didn't argue and took the brandy that H.J. poured, shuddering as it made its fiery way down her throat. Her shaking soon started to abate. "Thanks."

H.J. refilled the glass. "Do you want to go back?"

Hermione shook her head. "I'd just like to stay here."

A knock at the door interrupted them. H.J. went over to it to find Mione standing there. "Aren't you supposed to be getting ready to leave?"

"I just wanted to check before I did that Hermione's alright." Mione stepped into the room to reveal a small trolley behind her. "Thomas sent this up as a small apology."

Hermione smiled at her counterpart as she viewed the large bottle of champagne and strawberries dipped in chocolate. "He didn't have to do that."

Mione licked her lip. "He feels terrible about what happened."

Hermione looked closely at her face. "Is your face going to be alright? Your lips still looks a little swollen."

H.J. froze. "Malfoy hit you as well?" Hermione hadn't got as far as explaining that part to him.

Mione nodded. "Malfoy insulted me so I slapped him and he returned it. Xander caught him and punched him. I think Xander broke his nose."

H.J. scowled. "Does Thomas know what he did?"

Mione nodded. "He's talking to Malfoy now."

H.J.'s eyebrow shot up. "I just went to the suite the Malfoys are staying in and Narcissa Malfoy told me Draco had gone."

"Thomas said he was going to speak to him in Richard's study so they're probably there." Mione laid a hand on H.J.'s arm. "I know you're upset, H.J. but promise me you won't do anything stupid, okay?"

H.J. took a deep breath. "I won't."

Mione kissed him on the cheek. "Anyway, I'm sure by the time Thomas is through with him, Malfoy will be regretting his actions."

Mione had no idea how true her words were. Lucius had dressed down his son before Thomas had arrived.

Thomas knocked on Lucius' door. "Lucius."

"Thomas." Lucius stepped back to let him in. He wasn't entirely surprised to see Regulus Black follow Thomas in as well.

"I was going to discuss this in my father's study but seeing as your wife has kindly left us alone, we may as well do it here." Thomas took off his jacket and passed it to Regulus before unfastening his cufflinks and rolling up his sleeves. "I don't want to have to explain to my wife why I've got blood on my jacket."

Draco looked at Lucius who merely stared dispassionately back at him. Thomas sat down in a chair and looked across at the boy. "Did you really think I'd just let it go after you assaulted my wife and a guest in my parents' home?"

Draco defended himself. "Granger's a dirty Mudblood."

"I don't care if Miss Granger is the lowliest specimen of humanity in the world, you should know better than to assault a guest at someone's wedding." Thomas yawned lazily. "Now I see this going one of two ways. You can either spend the next week doing manual chores on the Muggle section of my parents' farm, or..."

Unsurprisingly Draco's upper lip rose in a sneer. "Are you mad?"

Thomas stood up. "No. I'm being polite and offering you an easy option. The second one won't go so well for you."

"What's the second option?" Draco thought Thomas was taking things a little far, especially as Xander had already broken his nose.

"I'm going to challenge you to a duel." Thomas watched Draco's face light up. "If you accept, I'd like you to know that normally I'd kill you at

the end of it, but as a favor to Lucius, I'm willing to forego that this time."

"You're too kind." Lucius inclined his head. "But I'm happy for Draco to pay the price if necessary."

Draco span on his heel. "Father!"

Lucius looked at Draco disgustedly. "You brought shame upon our family today. You're lucky I don't disown you." Draco paled at the thought of being disowned.

Thomas unholstered his wand. "So Draco, what's the choice to be?"

Believing himself to be an exceptional dueler, Draco sneered again. "The duel of course."

"Excellent." Thomas smiled and took a piece of cord from his pocket. "Lucius, Regulus. I'd like you both to act as witnesses."

All four of them then took hold of the cord and moments later found themselves in a beautifully decorated dueling room. Regulus and Lucius moved to the side to sit down.

Thomas gave Draco one final chance to get out of the duel. "I'm willing to give you one final opportunity to take the first option. I wouldn't want you to think me uncharitable on my wedding day."

Draco shook his head. "I'd prefer this."

Thomas turned to Lucius and Regulus. "Do you both agree to bear witness this duel?"

Both of them consented. Thomas turned back to Draco. "Anything is permissible except for irreversible deadly force. Agreed?"

Draco nodded. "Agreed." He then frowned as he tried to recall where he'd heard the phrase before.

Thomas knew exactly what Draco was trying to recall. "Yes, Draco, you've heard the expression before." Thomas smirked. "Let me give you a hint. I took on three opponents the last time you heard it."

Draco gasped as he realized who Thomas was. "Dominus?"

"Hello, Draco." Thomas inclined his head. "I told you to take the first option."

Next Chapter: Draco learns a harsh lesson; Mione sees another side to Thomas; H.J. and Hermione spend a little time together.

Chapter 21: Two Very Different Lessons and a Confession

Warning: This chapter contains violence (nothing too graphic) and adult sexual content!

"But you defended the Mudblood." Draco was totally taken aback.

"There is a time and place for everything, Draco." Thomas informed him. "And my wedding was neither the time nor the place for slaking your lust on one of my guests."

"But she's a Mudblood." Draco argued.

"You knew very well that there would be Mudbloods and Muggles at this wedding, and you stupidly chose to pick on the one who my wife is friends with." Thomas pointed out. "And who now also falls under my protection."

"You're really going to defend her?" Draco found it difficult to believe.

"You fucked up, Draco." Thomas said bluntly. "And yes, I am going to have to defend her as you've forced me into a situation where I can do little else as a pureblood gentleman than to offer my protection, and I really don't like being forced into doing things I don't want to do."

Draco swallowed hard at the cold look on Thomas' face. "So Granger's off limits?"

"If you so much as think about touching that girl again, you won't come out of the encounter alive." Thomas promised. "And should I hear that any of your friends attempt to do what you can't, then they'll join you as well."

Draco scratched the idea of getting his own back that way. "What about other Muggles and Muggleborns?"

"As I've just said, there's a time and a place for everything." Thomas turned to Lucius. "I think your son is somewhat lacking in matters of etiquette. Something I find a little surprising coming from a Malfoy."

"I'm afraid my son has chosen to ignore the lessons my wife has taught him." Lucius scowled at Draco. "Lessons she'll be going over again when we get home."

Contrary to what everyone thought, Narcissa, not Lucius, meted out the punishment in the Malfoy household, and Draco felt a shiver run down his spine at the thought of being at the wrong end of his mother's wand. "I'm sorry, Father."

"I don't think you are." Lucius addressed his son. "But after Thomas and, if there's anything left, your mother, finishes with you, I think you're going to be."

Thomas had a question for Draco. "Before we start, I just want you to know that the reason you're here isn't because of the Mudblood. Do you know why you're here, Draco?"

"For insulting your wife." Draco answered nervously.

"I think you're conveniently forgetting that you also assaulted her." Thomas reminded Draco.

"She hit me first." Draco defended himself.

"I'm not surprised." Thomas had asked Mione what Draco had said. "I think calling my wife a Colonial whore and implying that I was the highest bidder for her services may have upset my wife more than a little."

Lucius, who hadn't heard about that part, winced. "Draco will be making reparation to your wife, Thomas."

"I wouldn't expect anything less." Thomas acknowledged Lucius' offer before turning back to Draco. "And you'll also be making reparation to Miss Granger."

"I'm giving that Mudblood nothing." Despite the situation he was in, Draco had no intention of doing the right thing towards Hermione. "She's not a pureblood and isn't entitled."

Lucius interrupted. "Draco, should you refuse anything Thomas demands from you again, then I will gladly let him end this duel as he wants."

Draco stared at Lucius as if he'd never seen his father before. "But I'm your son and heir."

"Your mother can always provide me with another." Lucius reminded his son. "Now are you willing to make reparation to both Miss Granger and Mrs. Seville?"

Draco had little choice except to agree. "I am."

"Thank you, Lucius." Thomas turned back to face Draco. "So are you ready?"

"Yes." Draco knew that he stood little chance of besting Thomas but, having already agreed to the duel, had little choice but to take part.

The two of them bowed and Draco immediately sent a Reducto spell flying at Thomas who easily sidestepped it. Thomas then threw up a shield and let Draco throw spell after spell at him. "You're going to have to do better than that, Draco. I've seen more impressive first years."

Draco fired off a blood boiling curse. "I'd like to see a first year do that."

"I could." Thomas felt the curse ricochet off his shield.

"Viscus Extrico." Draco snarled.

Thomas strengthened his shield. "I think my wife might have been a little annoyed if that had connected. I sure she doesn't want to see my stomach contents on our wedding night."

Draco couldn't believe that Thomas wasn't even bothering to return fire at him. "Perhaps she'll prefer this. Lente Castro."

Thomas moved out of the way as well as shielding himself, as it was one spell he most certainly didn't want getting through. "That's a nasty curse, Draco. Perhaps I should return it. Lente Castro."

Not able to step out of the way in time, and not wanting to trust a shield alone, Draco hit the floor as the curse flew over his head. Thomas waited for Draco to get up. "A pity I missed. I'm not sure the world deserves to bear witness to your vile offspring."

"Better than yours." Draco retorted as he fired off a bone-breaking curse.

Thomas stood there, again letting the spell reflect off his shield. "Try a little harder, Draco."

Draco spent the next five minutes becoming more and more exhausted as he expended his energy in trying to get through Thomas' shield as Thomas continued to taunt him.

Finally, however, Thomas decided that enough was enough and the time was coming to put an end to this part of the duel. "Your power level really is pathetic, Draco."

Draco, who during his bombardment of Thomas' shield had managed to hold up his own shield and fire spells off at the same time, scowled at the comment. "My power level is well above average."

"For a squib maybe." Thomas smirked as the barb struck home.

Tired and, after listening to Thomas' neverending barrage of insults, Draco finally lost his temper and, without thinking about the consequences, dropped his shield in order to be able to fire off the one spell that was off limits. "Avada..."

"Silencio." Thomas' simple spell hit Draco squarely in the face. "I don't want you dying for flaunting the rules of this duel and thus depriving me of the satisfaction due to me."

Unable to speak to defend himself, Draco could do little as Thomas effortlessly disarmed him. "Now Draco, I think it's time I showed you what happens to someone who crosses me."

Draco found himself flying backwards through the air until he hit the wall at the far end of the room, his head striking it sharply. After dizzily picking himself up off the floor, Draco found chains, that had dropped down from the ceiling and risen up from the floor, wrapping themselves around his wrists and ankles.

Thomas walked over in a leisurely manner. "Now I could use spells to achieve what I'm about to do but I believe I'm going to get more satisfaction from doing it this way." When Draco didn't answer, Thomas released the silencing spell. "That's better. I want to be able to hear you scream."

Draco could feel sweat starting to coat his back at Thomas' statement. "I'm not going to give you the pleasure."

Thomas knew differently. "Oh I think you will. I've only known two people who could stand the sort of pain I'm going to inflict on you and not beg for mercy, and I have a feeling you're not going to be the third."

"I can take whatever you throw at me." Draco's displayed an air of bravado he didn't actually feel.

"Perhaps you can; we'll just have to see." Thomas knew without doubt, however, that Draco would be brought quite literally to his knees by what he was about to do to him.

"Do your best." Draco sneered.

"In that case, let's get down to business. Now as you're probably aware, Draco, I'm a man who spends a lot of time around Muggles, and I've actually learnt some interesting things from them." Thomas watched disdain cross Draco's face. "I can see you don't approve."

"Muggles are below us." Draco snarled. "As are their ways."

"I agree." Thomas circled the boy as if weighing up the situation. "But if a wizard bothered to delve deeper into the history of things, as I have, they'd have discovered that most Muggle traditions and pastimes are based on something we introduced to them, whether by accident or design."

Draco shrugged. "Big deal."

"Perhaps a little demonstration." Thomas did nothing for a while lulling Draco in a false sense of security, before bringing his knee up towards his chest and then lashing out, catching Draco in his stomach with the heel of his foot. "I think I forgot to mention that some of the interesting things I've actually learnt are Muggle martial arts. That was just a basic side kick."

Not expecting it, Draco had been taken totally by surprise, the wind being knocked out of him. Thomas waited patiently for the boy to recover. "It hurts doesn't it?"

Draco shook his head. "I've had worse."

"I'm sure you have." Thomas turned his back on Draco before kicking out again, surprising the boy once more as he caught him in the chest. "And that is a back kick. If you're not expecting it, then it's likely to take a person unawares as it did you."

Once Draco got his breath back, he stupidly couldn't resist mouthing off at Thomas. "It's still crude compared to what we can do with a wand."

Thomas rubbed his chin as if in thought. "Let's compare. Crucio."

Draco grunted as the curse hit him. Thomas watched without emotion as Draco writhed and pulled against the chains, blood appearing at his wrists where the boy tried to pull free in an effort to escape the pain. Thomas noted that Draco was biting down and through his own lip in an effort not to scream aloud. Wanting to move on, Thomas ended the low powered spell. "You know, I think you might be right. This way I don't have to make any effort to touch you, or exert myself."

It appears that I might get more satisfaction from using our ways after all."

Draco expected to be hit immediately with another spell and was surprised when Thomas did nothing, instead allowing him to regain his footing, albeit shakily as the aftermath of the Cruciatus spell meant his body was shaking uncontrollably. After nothing happened for a few minutes, and thinking Thomas had finished with him, Draco made an offer. "Release me and I'll yield." When Thomas said nothing, Draco went further and apologized to him. "I'm sorry that I insulted and slapped your wife. "

Thomas had deliberately remained silent, waiting to see what Draco would do. "As much as I'd like to, I'm afraid I can't release you as I still don't believe you're truly sorry for what you did, and I'm not going to be fully satisfied until I see that from you. Now, as much as I'd enjoy making you pay by taking my time and torturing you slowly to make up for the insult you paid to my wife, I have a wedding night to attend to, so this will have to do." Thomas aimed his wand at Draco. "Exuo Induviae Primoris."

Draco gasped as his jacket and shirt vanished leaving his upper body naked. "What the hell?"

"I don't want them impeding the next spell." Thomas smiled maliciously. "You said that my wife sold herself to the highest bidder. Am I correct?"

Draco felt as though his heart was going to jump out of his chest, and not wanting to admit to what he'd said, didn't answer. Thomas sighed. "Crucio."

This time Draco couldn't help but scream as Thomas overpowered the spell, showing Draco that he'd gone easy on him the first time. After a few moments, Thomas released the spell. "Now Draco, answer my question. Am I correct?"

Unable to speak, Draco nodded as he struggled to regain his footing.

After waiting for Draco to get back to his feet, Thomas continued his discourse. "This wedding cost me in the region of 400,000 galleons, to say nothing of what my parents spent, so I'd say that it was a pretty high bid for my wife's services, wouldn't you?"

Not wanting to undergo the Cruciatus again, a now very frightened Draco answered the question without hesitation. "Yes."

"So I think my satisfaction should be linked to that figure." Thomas could see that Draco had no idea of what he was planning to do. "You might want to count, Draco. I think one lash for every 10,000 galleons will do the trick, so once you reach forty the worst of tonight's lesson will be over. Verbero Tergus Quadraginta."

Thomas walked away as an invisible whip began its work on Draco's back. After pouring himself a scotch from the drinks tray that was set out on a side table, Thomas sat down to wait for the punishment to end.

Regulus was a little shocked at the barbarity Thomas was displaying. "Don't you think you're being a little harsh?"

"He'll survive. He's young and fit." Thomas raised an eyebrow. "Unless of course, you'd like to step in and take Draco's place."

Regulus backed off. "No."

Thomas stared intently at Regulus. "He touched what was my mine. As I told Lucius earlier, the only reason I'm letting him live at all is as a favor to him." He then addressed Lucius. "As Draco's father, would you care to take any of the punishment I'm inflicting on your son?"

"I would not." Lucius had no intention of interfering.

By the time thirty came Draco was begging and screaming, snot and tears running down his face in a constant stream. Thomas looked at the time and stood up. "As much as I'd like to wait until we reach forty, I really have to be going and his whining is beginning to get on my nerves. Finite Incantatum."

Draco sagged in the chains, his arms screaming with pain as the chains weren't quite long enough to allow him to kneel. Thomas dispelled the spell which had invoked the chains and they unsnapped from Draco's arms and wrists, before receding into the ceiling and floor. Draco hit the floor, crying quietly, unable to move after the beating he'd received.

Thomas walked over and deliberately ground his foot into Draco's wand hand, making Draco scream out once more as Thomas broke several of his fingers. "If you so much as even glance at my wife again, I promise that you won't survive our next meeting." Thomas then kicked Draco viciously in the head and the boy passed into unconsciousness. "Obliviate." Thomas then removed any knowledge of who he truly was.

Lucius walked over to join Thomas where he stood above his bloody son. "I wish to apologize again for Draco's behavior."

"Please forget about it. I'm more than satisfied with the outcome." Thomas shook hands with Lucius. "Please warn Draco that if he so much as breathes a word about who did this to him, then I can guarantee that this experience will seem like a walk in the park in comparison to what I'll do to him next time."

"He won't be saying anything." Lucius promised. "You have my word."

Thomas knew that Lucius would make sure that Draco would be keeping quiet, although he suspected that embarrassment would act just as efficiently as his father's threats. "As a finale, I think Draco should experience firsthand the type of tender care Muggle hospitals inflict upon their patients." Thomas pulled out a coin. "Portus. This will deliver him to a local hospital. I hope he enjoys his stay." Thomas threw the coin on top of Draco and he disappeared. "Now if you gentlemen will excuse me, I have a wedding night ritual to complete." Thomas then also vanished.

Karanga Mansion, Sydney

Thomas apparated Mione into his house on his parents' estate. "You can explore the house in the morning, but right now I have something I want to show you."

Mione had never been in the house before, as the few times she and Thomas had visited Sydney in the last month, the house had been going through a remodel so they'd stayed with his parents. "What is it?"

"Close your eyes and keep them shut." Thomas instructed as he led Mione a short distance up the corridor, before opening a door and guiding Mione inside.

Mione kept her eyes closed as Thomas had requested. "Can I open them yet?"

Thomas positioned Mione so that she was able to see the whole of the room he'd led her into. "You can."

Mione opened her eyes. "It's beautiful, Thomas, but I didn't think you'd be one to adhere to the pureblood custom of separate bedrooms."

In spite of her words, Thomas could see that Mione was truly delighted with the room. "I don't particularly but I still wanted you to have a sanctuary of your own. I've had the same done at the Island House and at Grimmauld Square. However, I don't expect you to spend much time in any of your bedrooms as I'd prefer for you to sleep with me. All of the clothes you brought with you, and a few extras are through that door. The other one leads to your bathroom."

Mione turned. "It's more than I deserve."

"You deserve the best." Thomas lifted Mione's hand and kissed it. "I've left you something special in the closet to wear tonight. I'll leave you now to get changed. My room is the second door on the left."

After Thomas left, Mione showered and slipped into the nightgown and robe that Thomas had obviously picked out for her. When she returned to the bedroom she found on her pillow a very familiar black

rose and an envelope which Mione opened. Only three words were written on the parchment inside.

‘Come to me.’

Mione picked up the rose and, even though she didn’t know why, she suddenly felt panicked. Spotting an open bottle of champagne on the dresser that hadn’t been there before, she poured herself a glass of it before shaking her head at herself for being so ridiculous, and walked out of the room.

Hearing a knock at the door, Thomas stood up, and opened it before holding out his hand to take Mione’s and pulling her inside. “I was beginning to think you were going to let me spend our wedding night alone.”

Mione admitted why she'd taken so long. “I don’t know why but I feel terribly nervous.”

Thomas took the glass of champagne from her and put it down. “So why is that?”

“I don’t know.” Mione couldn’t look at him.

“You do know.” Thomas moved to stand behind her, not touching her, and whispered into her ear. “Tell me, Mione. Why are you so nervous?”

Mione shivered. “Because I have the feeling it’s going to be different tonight.”

Thomas knew that it was going to be. “Mione, you do know I love you, don't you?”

“Yes.” Mione could feel his warm breath graze her neck as he stood behind her. "And I love you."

“How much do you love me, Mione?” Thomas trailed his lips over the back of Mione’s neck as he waited for Mione’s response.

Mione could feel herself beginning to tremble at the touch of his lips on her skin. "More than I've ever loved anyone."

At Mione's words, Thomas took her hand to lead her into his bedroom. Mione's nerves went into overdrive as her eyes fell upon the largest four poster bed she'd ever seen. Thomas put a finger under her chin so that he could look into her eyes. "Do you trust me?"

Mione steadily met his gaze. "Unreservedly."

Thomas removed his finger and walked towards the bed. "Close the door."

Hands shaking, Mione closed the door and went to walk over to Thomas, only for him to stop her.

"Stay where you are." Thomas removed his jacket and let it fall to the floor before removing his cufflinks and dropping them on top of the jacket. Leaning against one of the bed pillars, Thomas let his eyes roam indolently over Mione, making her face flare. "Take off your robe."

Even though she was a little taken aback at his request, Mione did as Thomas asked. "What..."

Thomas held a finger to his lips. "Shh." He then walked back over to where Mione was standing, slowly circling her before stepping away. "Now, Mione, slowly take off your gown."

Thomas had never acted like this before, and Mione's shocked eyes flew up to meet his. "I can't."

Thomas knew that it was going to take some coaxing to get her to do as he wanted. "I thought you said you trusted me."

"I do." Mione protested.

"Then take off the gown." Thomas demanded.

Terror and excitement mingled in Mione at the authoritative tone that had edged into Thomas' voice, and she raised her hand before letting it fall back to her side again. "I really can't, Thomas."

Thomas let the tips of his fingers trail over the back of Mione's neck before whispering softly to her. "I need to see you, Mione. Take off the gown."

Mione again lifted a hesitant hand before halting with her hand in mid-air. Thomas reached out and slid one of the straps of her gown down her arm for her. "Your turn, Mione."

Mione couldn't believe she was going to do it, but her hand resumed its journey towards the remaining strap that held up her gown before sliding it off her shoulder. Thomas moved to stand in front of Mione again. He could see that her pupils were dilated and her skin had started to become flushed and he slowly reached out to pluck open the lowest bow just below her stomach that held her nightgown closed. As Thomas undid each of the remaining bows that lined the front of the gown, Mione shut her eyes until he eventually untied the final one and with nothing to hold it together, the gown slithered to pool at her ankles in a puddle of yellow silk. By the time she opened her eyes again, Thomas had moved to sit down on the bed and was staring at her. Mione went to cover herself but Thomas shook his head. "Keep your arms at your sides, Mione."

Mione felt as if her entire body was on fire with embarrassment but she felt almost compelled to do as he said. Thomas continued to stare before he finally said something. "You are truly beautiful."

Mione went to deny it and Thomas held a finger to his lips again. "Shh." He then crooked a finger at her. "Come here."

Still trying to resist the temptation to cover herself with her hands, Mione walked over to the bed. By now she didn't know if she wanted Thomas to kiss her or if she wanted to flee.

Thomas made the decision for her and he covered her mouth with his, suckling gently on her bottom lip as he did so. When Mione opened

her mouth to him in an attempt to deepen the kiss, Thomas pulled away. "Lie back on the bed."

Her heart racing, Mione went to climb onto the bed only to be stopped by Thomas. "That isn't what I said." He gently pulled her forward until she was standing facing him with her legs backed up against the bed. "Now lie back."

Her face burning, Mione lay down. As her back touched the bed she was aware of the soft velvet cover that caressed her skin as she brushed against it. Thomas leant forward and grabbed Mione by her waist, lifting her slightly so that she was moved further up onto the bed. Mione's anxiety increased as she realized that the height of the bed meant that her legs were now left dangling, not quite able to reach the floor. Thomas simply smiled and began to undress. Mione wanted to look away but couldn't, and more heat suffused her face as he slipped out of the silk boxer shorts he was wearing. Unlike her, however, he displayed no signs of embarrassment. Thomas stood over her and asked the same question he'd asked earlier. "Do you trust me, Mione?"

As Mione nodded shakily, Thomas knelt down in front of her. "I want you to keep your hands at your side. Do not move them."

Mione sucked in her breath as she felt Thomas' mouth kiss her ankle. Slowly he began to make his way up her leg. When he reached the dip behind her right knee, Mione could feel her shaking starting to intensify as he flicked his tongue out to caress it. Thomas then continued to use his lips and hands to caress her until he reached her stomach. Meeting her eyes once more he rose up to kiss her on the lips before kneeling back down. "Remember, Mione, do not move your hands."

Mione was hard pushed to remember Thomas' command as he gently parted her legs before using his lips and tongue on her until Mione felt as if she no longer knew who she was; all she knew were the sensations that he was creating in her. Before she could go over the edge, however, Thomas resumed his journey up her body, letting his tongue dip into her belly button as he kissed his way up to her neck, deliberately ignoring her breasts and mouth, before making his

way down Mione's left arm. Mione moaned out loud when Thomas reached her hand as he took her middle finger into his mouth and sucked on it, swirling his tongue around it in a mockery of a kiss before releasing it to climb onto the bed. Thomas was pleased to see that Mione hadn't moved as he positioned himself to lean back against the headboard. Only then did he give her permission to do so. "Come here, Mione."

Mione slid to the floor, her legs threatening to give way as her feet touched it. After turning around she climbed onto the bed and moved towards Thomas before stopping, unsure of what to do. Thomas held out his hand in invitation and Mione took it, allowing him to steady her as he pulled her across him so that she was straddling his lap. "Now kiss me, Mione."

Mione had thought he'd never ask. Placing her hands on either side of his face, Mione closed her eyes and brushed her lips over Thomas' before increasing the pressure and using her tongue to gain entry to his mouth. As her tongue slipped into the warmth of his mouth, Thomas caught it gently between his teeth before sucking slowly on it and then releasing it. Wanting more, Mione whimpered when Thomas lifted his head and took her hands in his own before placing them on her hips. "What do you want, Mione?"

Intending to answer the question with her body, Mione went to sink down onto Thomas but with his hands firmly holding her in place above him, she couldn't. Thomas smiled languidly. "Look at me and tell me what you want."

Mione's voice was barely above a whisper as she told him. "I want to make love to you."

As Mione finished her sentence, Thomas used his hands to guide her down onto him. Mione sighed contentedly as she felt him fill her, her muscles contracting as she pulled him deeper inside. Still holding her arms at her side, Thomas tilted her backwards and covered her breast with his mouth, biting softly on her nipple. After Thomas' earlier ministrations it was too much for Mione's over sensitized body, and she tensed, crying out. Thomas held her steady until her tremors began to abate before returning his attention to her breasts. Mione

soon felt the same heat beginning to build inside her again and she tried to increase the rhythm but Thomas held her back with his hands. By the time she climaxed for the second time, Mione was almost in tears with need, as Thomas had taken her to the brink several times before allowing her to go over.

As she got her breath back, Mione thought she couldn't take anymore but Thomas still drove her on. This time, however, he let her set the pace, simply keeping his hands on her arms to steady her. Mione desperately wanted to touch him but Thomas still refused to free her hands. As she got closer and closer to going over the edge again, Mione's movements became more and more erratic, so Thomas released Mione's arms and guided them so that she could hold onto the headboard behind him before returning his hands to her hips.

Finally giving into his own needs, Thomas used his hands to increase the tempo, making Mione cry out. Thomas knew from the tremors wracking Mione's body, that Mione wasn't going to last much longer and he spoke softly to her. "Mione, open your eyes and look at me." As Mione dazedly looked at him, she felt her release rip through her and even though she tried, she couldn't keep her eyes open as she let her head fall forward. Thomas could feel Mione's muscles contracting around him and he groaned deep in his throat as he gained his own release. As he did so, a white light momentarily enclosed the pair before dissipating. Thomas smiled to himself as it did, knowing that their marriage was now binding.

Mione felt as if she was a boneless ragdoll as Thomas took her arms away from the headboard, wrapping them around his neck, before he finally checked to see how she was. "Are you alright?"

Mione nodded but didn't answer verbally. Thomas stroked her back and gently kissed her neck before setting her away from him so that he could see her face. After a few minutes, Mione let out a juddering breath before finally saying something. "Why wouldn't you let me touch you?"

"Because I wanted to show you what it's like to be in control, Mione." Thomas informed her. "Something you're going to learn all about."

Mione frowned. "What do you mean?"

"I want you to feel the same way I did as we made love." Thomas started kissing her neck again. "Which is why for the rest of tonight I'm going to let you do whatever want."

Mione wasn't quite sure what Thomas expected. "I'm not sure what you mean."

Thomas could see she was nervous. "I want you to tell me what you want from me, Mione."

Mione felt as she had when Thomas had asked her to disrobe. "I don't know if I can."

Thomas whispered softly in her ear. "Don't you want to feel all powerful, Mione?"

At Thomas' question, Mione felt a nervous thrill go through her as she acknowledged she did. "Yes."

"Then tell me what you want." Thomas demanded as he slid down the bed so that Mione found herself sitting above him, her hands resting lightly on his chest.

Mione ran her hands over his chest. "First tell me you love me."

"Mione, I love you." Thomas knew that Mione wanted reassuring before she went further.

Mione felt a shiver go through her at his words. "Tell me you worship me."

"I worship you." Thomas could see the kick Mione was already starting to get out of the experience.

Mione leant forward and began to kiss the spot she knew was most sensitive behind his ear, and felt gratified when he groaned lightly. She then moved her mouth to whisper softly in his ear. "Now tell me you'd die for me."

Thomas hadn't expected that but answered her honestly. "I'd die for you."

As Thomas finished speaking, Mione got up and climbed off the bed, glad that her legs felt steadier than they had earlier. Thomas looked over at her in askance. "Where are you going?"

Mischievously, Mione lifted a finger to her lips. "Shh."

Thomas couldn't help but smile as Mione copied his earlier gesture and he dutifully fell silent. Mione decided she liked the feeling of having power over Thomas. "I think we should take a swim. Bring the champagne."

Emboldened by the heady sensation of being in charge, Mione ignored the fact that she was still naked as she headed for the glass doors leading to their private pool, which even amidst her earlier nerves, she'd noticed as she'd entered Thomas' bedroom. Smiling to himself, Thomas lifted up his wand and invoked several privacy wards, before doing as his wife had asked by picking up the champagne and following her outside to join her in the swimming pool.

The Next Day

Hermione couldn't have been happier strolling along in the sunshine with H.J. "I feel a little guilty about leaving Cammie behind."

"Cammie didn't seem too upset at staying behind with the others." H.J.'s daughter had actually been excited at getting to spend some time in the large pool at the house they were staying in.

"I know but I still think she'd have enjoyed this." Hermione had been reassured by Cassandra and Alex that they'd keep an eye on Cammie, as Cassandra hadn't wanted to go into Sydney with the others, preferring to stay behind and keep Alex company. "Do you think Cassandra likes Alex?"

“Katherine said that they spend most of last night dancing and talking together after we left early, so I think so.” H.J. was pleased for the girl. “And Alex is hardly likely to be intimidated by who her father is.”

Hermione knew from Cassandra that Sirius was rather strict with her. “I’m glad I’m not in her shoes.”

H.J. gave a mock shudder. “So am I.”

Hermione suddenly drew to a halt and gasped. “Oh my God.”

H.J. immediately spotted the photo and headline on a newspaper on the stand in front of them that had caused Hermione's outburst. “Youth savagely attacked.”

“He looks an awful lot like Malfoy.” Hermione felt queasy as she remembered H.J.’s outburst the previous night.

H.J. knew what Hermoine was thinking. “I didn’t do it if that’s what you’re worried about.”

Hermione immediately felt guilty for suspecting H.J., and she remembered Thomas' warning to Malfoy. “Do you think Thomas did it to him?”

“I’d think it more likely that Lucius Malfoy did it.” H.J. remembered what the man he’d known had been like. “I can only imagine how pissed he must have been for having to apologize to you for Draco’s behavior.”

Hermione was shaking. “How could anyone do that to another human being?”

H.J. sighed as he knew that he was going to have to come clean with her about his past, and put his hand on her arm. “Hermione, I think we need to go somewhere and talk.”

“What is it?” Hermione could see the stress that suddenly lined H.J.’s face.

"I've done far worse." H.J. wasn't surprised when Hermione pulled free of his grip.

"If that's true, then I'm not sure I want to go anywhere with you." Hermione found it difficult to believe that H.J. could act so barbarically.

"Please Hermione. I need to explain." H.J. pleaded with the girl.

Seeing the plaintive look on H.J.'s face, Hermione nodded. "Okay."

"Let's find somewhere to apparate." The two walked in silence until they reached a quiet spot where H.J. put his hand on Hermione's arm again, wincing as he felt her flinch, before apparating them back to his bedroom. "Sit down."

"I only told you that Voldemort killed Luna, but there's more to it than that." H.J. then told her about Luna, Wormtail and what he'd done to the man. "I didn't care what he had to say. I just wanted to hurt him as he'd hurt Luna."

Even though she was horrified at what H.J. had told her, Hermione did understand why he'd done it. "H.J. I'm sorry that I reacted as I did."

"If I'd have been you, I'd probably have reacted the same way." H.J. didn't want Hermione apologizing for something she had no reason to.

"I still should have listened before judging you." Hermione felt guilty at how she'd reacted. "It must have been terrible for you to find out what Wormtail had done to Luna."

"It was, and last night, when you told me what Malfoy had tried to do to you, it brought it all back." H.J. admitted. "I haven't finished yet though."

Hermione wondered what else he could have to tell her, but she knew that she would listen without judging. "Go on."

"I did the same to Sirius Black as I'd done to Wormtail. That time, however, I used a spell instead of a knife." H.J. could see that

Hermione was waiting for him to go on. "You want to know why don't you?" Hermione nodded so H.J. continued. "I know that Harry mentioned that Sirius Black was Mione's birth father."

Hermione recalled Harry telling her, Xander and Orion about Black. "I remember him bringing it up when he said that Sirius had given Mione the Dark Mark."

"What Harry failed to mention was that Mione's mother was raped by Black resulting in Mione." H.J. watched horror and disgust ripple over Hermione's features before dropping onto the sofa and letting his head fall into his hands. "He deserved everything I did to him but even putting Black and Wormtail aside, I've still done some terrible things, Hermione."

"Were any of them without justification?" Hermione didn't need to hear everything H.J. had done, just that he hadn't done it without good reason.

"No." H.J. had believed himself warranted in carrying out each and every attack he had. "And when I get my hands on Malfoy, that's going to be entirely justified too." Despite his promise to Mione the previous night, H.J. still had every intention of making Malfoy pay for what he'd put Hermione through.

Hermione put a hand on his shoulder. "I don't want you to go after Malfoy. Judging from the newspaper, he's already been punished, and he's certainly not worth going to Azkaban for."

H.J. looked up. "For you it would be."

Hermione felt her stomach go over at H.J.'s declaration. "H.J. I admit that last night was a terrible experience but please believe me when I say I'm alright now." Hermione could feel H.J. shaking and letting go of his shoulder, she walked over to the drinks tray and poured out a brandy before returning to the sofa with it. "Someone told me this was good for shock."

H.J. smiled up at her and took the brandy before knocking it straight back and shuddering. "Thank you."

"H.J. Please give me your word you won't go after Malfoy." Hermione didn't want H.J. putting himself in jeopardy because of her.

Knowing that Hermione would blame herself if he did, H.J. promised he wouldn't; this time meaning it. "I give you my word I won't." H.J. then stood up and put the brandy glass down. "Hermione, I'm sorry about today. This wasn't quite what I had in mind when I asked if you wanted to spend the day with me."

"I'm glad you told me. H.J. I want you to know that it doesn't change how I feel about you." Hermione blushed as she told him. "And we've still got the rest of the day."

H.J. felt relieved at Hermione's declaration. "So what do you want to do? Do you want to go back into Sydney?"

Hermione shook her head. "Not particularly. I think I'd like to listen to some music and sit out on the verandah, if that's okay with you."

"It is." H.J. walked over to the CD player and switched it on. Frank Sinatra's voice drifted into the bedroom. "But instead of sitting outside, there's something I want to do. We didn't get a chance to dance last night." He held out a hand to Hermione. "Would you like to dance with me now?"

Hermione took H.J.'s hand and let him hold her, feeling secure in his arms. To try and distract herself from her nerves, Hermione immediately began to babble away to H.J. "I was surprised to find electronics in a wizarding household."

"Mione told me it's because of all the Muggle guests Thomas' family have to entertain in their line of business." H.J. ran his thumb over's Hermione's hand where he held it as they danced.

Hermione hadn't known that a simple touch could make her feel so warm inside. "What about the main house? Does it have electricity?"

"That's strictly magical." H.J. buried his nose in Hermione's hair; he could still smell the remnants of the shampoo she'd used earlier that

morning. "But the meeting facilities are apparently a hybrid. As you probably noticed the ballroom was lit with electricity, not candlelight."

"I did notice." Hermione was aware of H.J.'s breath against her ear.

H.J. pulled his hand free from Hermione's and placed it on her back to join his other one, pulling them closer together. "I'm glad we've got electricity here so that we can dance to the music like this."

"So am I." Hermione copied H.J. and put her own arms around his waist as she placed her face on his chest.

H.J. tried to concentrate on the music, as he slowly led Hermione around the room. "Did I tell you how beautiful you looked yesterday?"

Hermione was glad H.J. couldn't see her face. "I wouldn't go that far."

"I would." H.J. slowed their dancing down so that they were centered on just one spot. "Hermione?"

As Hermione lifted her head up to look at him, H.J. stopped moving. "Can I kiss you?"

In answer, Hermione closed her eyes and was surprised when instead of kissing her lips, H.J. instead lightly brushed kisses over her nose, cheeks, and eyes before finally turning his attention to her mouth. Even then he didn't rush. As H.J. brushed soft kiss after soft kiss over Hermione's lips, she felt as if her bones had turned to liquid. Moaning softly, she parted her lips and H.J. deepened the kiss but still held back until Hermione began to return the kiss. As she did, H.J. placed a hand at the back of Hermione's head and he began to explore Hermione's mouth until eventually he groaned and pulled back. "Do you remember our conversation about just being friends?"

Hermione did. "Yes."

"Would you consider changing your mind?" H.J. asked hopefully.

Hermione nodded shyly. "I would."

H.J. felt elated at her answer. “In that case would you like to go out to dinner with me tonight? I’m afraid I can’t offer plane rides and dinner in Paris though.”

“I’d be happy at PizzaExpress, not that I’m entirely sure whether they have PizzaExpress over here.” Hermione mentioned the name of the restaurant they’d taken Cammie to on their last day out together.

“It wouldn’t matter if they had as I was thinking of somewhere a little more up market than that, and definitely without my daughter in attendance.” H.J. watched color steal up Hermione’s cheeks. “So is that a yes to dinner then?”

“Yes.” Hermione answered simply.

Next Chapter: A break-up; Cassandra starts her new position; Thomas receives important news; Remus makes a terrible discovery.

Chapter 22: The Four Pillars

Nod to Stargate included in this chapter.

August 28th 2003

Tonks raised herself onto her elbow and looked down at Harry. "I think we should stop seeing each other."

"You wait until after we've just had sex to decide to tell me you're going to break up with me?" Harry ran a hand up Tonks' arm.

"I think it's for the best." Tonks let her fingers trail over Harry's chest.

Harry moved his hand into Tonks hair, feeling her shiver as he did so. "Why?"

Tonks let Harry drag her down and kiss her before she answered him. "Because I'm getting too used to this."

"And that's a problem because?" Harry repeated the kiss.

"Because eventually you're going to leave me, so I'd rather just end it now on my terms." Tonks slid her hand beneath the sheet and below Harry's waistline, making him groan.

"Do you end all of your relationships when things start getting too complicated for you?" Harry grabbed Tonks' hand and placed it on his shoulder instead.

Tonks swung herself over to sit on his lap, smiling down at him. "None of them have lasted this long before."

"So why the rush to end this?" Harry ran his hands over Tonks' breasts, letting them trail down until they came to rest on her hips.

Tonks leant forward so that her breasts grazed Harry's chest and kissed him before sitting back up again. "Because I'm going to fall for you if I don't end it now, and I know you don't want that."

Harry lifted his hand to caress Tonks' face. "How do you know what I want?"

"I know because we both made it perfectly clear to each other what we wanted from this relationship when it started." Tonks turned her head to kiss Harry's palm. "And I don't think you've changed what you want."

Harry moved his hand back to Tonks' hip and lifted her slightly. "I know I don't want this to end."

Tonks slid down until Harry was fully enclosed inside of her warmth. "Why not, Harry?"

Harry used his hands to steady Tonks as she began to move. "Because I like spending time with you."

"Not quite the answer I was looking for." Tonks informed him as she increased the pace. "And..."

"Enough talking." Harry pulled her head down to kiss her, bring her speech to an end.

For a while all that could be heard in the room were moans and murmurs as the two of them moved towards a shared goal. Afterwards, Harry held Tonks as she stretched out on top of him. "I don't want this to be over."

"Can you honestly tell me that you love me or that you'll ever love me, Harry?" Tonks asked as he stroked her back.

Harry buried his face in her hair. "Do you have to ask me that?"

"You've just answered my question." Tonks kissed his neck. "Which is why this is over."

Harry wrapped his arms tightly around her. "Do you want me to leave?"

"No." Tonks laid her head on his chest. "I want you to spend the night."

Neither of them slept much during the night, spending most of the time making love until daylight permeated the room and Tonks lifted her head. "So I guess this is it."

Harry sat up. "It doesn't have to be."

"Yes it does." Tonks gave Harry a gentle push.

Harry reluctantly climbed out of bed and started to pull on his clothes. "Tonks..."

Tonks was already in the bathroom. "Goodbye Harry." She then closed the door.

Harry knew he couldn't leave her like that, not when he could already hear her sniffing. Pushing open the bathroom door, he found her with her face buried in a thick towel. "Come here."

Tonks let Harry enfold her in his arms. "I hate you."

"I know." Harry gently stroked her hair.

"You're a bastard." Tonks sobbed into his shoulder. "You made me do what I promised myself I'd never do."

"I'm sorry." Harry kissed the top of her head.

Tonks looked up, tears falling down her cheeks. "I'm going to get over you."

"I know you will." Harry soothed. "And I know I'm certainly not worth these tears."

Tonks pulled away from him and wiped her face. "You're damn right you're not. I've done my crying, now get out."

Harry shook his head. "I'm not leaving you like this."

"Harry, if you care for me at all, please just go." Tonks pleaded.

Harry gently kissed her on the nose. "If you ever need me..."

"I know where to find you." Tonks finished his sentence as she took a step backwards. "Now just get out of my house."

Harry touched her face before letting his hand fall away. "I'll see you soon, okay?"

"Okay." Tonks took another step back. "Now go."

Harry disappeared and Tonks walked back into the bedroom before dropping down onto the bed and beginning to sob again.

August 31st 2003

Cassandra opened the door to the girls' suite. "It doesn't look as if anything's changed except that there's a new door over there."

Katherine followed her in. "I can't believe we're back here. I just hope that Dad isn't too eager to get started."

Cassandra grinned happily at her friend. "At least I know Harry won't be too strict."

"You've never worked with him before. How can you know that he won't?" Katherine asked. "Don't forget he used to hold the same job as your Dad does."

"Come on, Katherine. This is Harry we're talking about." Cassandra was quite confident that she was right.

A tap at the new door disturbed the two girls. Cassandra walked over and opened it to find Harry on the other side. "Harry, hi."

"When you're ready, do you want to come through to my rooms? They're through that door over there." Harry pointed to a door behind him. "I want to go through a few things with you."

"Give me five minutes." Cassandra closed the door to the office to find Katherine smirking. "Okay, so I was wrong."

Katherine had no chance to gloat further as yet another knock disturbed the girls. Katherine walked to the main door to find James standing there. "Hi Dad."

"Hi Katherine." James greeted his daughter. "Cassandra, has Harry spoken to you yet?"

"He has, Uncle James." Cassandra nodded towards the office door. "I'm about to go and touch base with him."

"Good." James looked pointedly at Katherine. "Are you ready to get started or do you need some time?"

"I can come now." Katherine put down her cloak and followed her Dad out.

Cassandra opened the door to the office and walked through before knocking on Harry's door, smiling hesitantly when Harry opened it. "Can I come in?" Harry stood back and let Cassandra by, and she glanced around the room. "It's a bit bare isn't it?"

"I've only just moved in." Harry pointed out. "If you remember, I was sharing with H.J. up until now and most of my stuff is still in boxes at my new apartment."

"New apartment?" Cassandra queried. "I didn't realize you were moving."

"I moved in yesterday." Harry then explained his reasoning behind the move. "As much as I like living with H.J. and Hermione, I want the privacy that my own home affords me, especially if I'm going home dressed as an Unspeakable."

Cassandra understood his reasoning. "So where is it?"

"It's in a block of flats in Kensington." Harry had had to pay a fortune for the small but beautifully decorated apartment. "And it's in the middle of Muggle territory but I like it."

"Good." Not sure what else to say, Cassandra stood in the middle of the sitting room, and waited for Harry to say something.

Harry decided to get the one matter he wanted dealt with that day out of the way. "Let's go into the office."

Cassandra walked back into it as Harry leant against the doorjamb. "So which desk do you want?"

Cassandra pointed to the smaller one which was nearer to the door to her rooms. "That one will be fine."

"Okay." Harry walked back into his rooms. "Now we've got that dealt with, do you want a glass of wine?"

Cassandra stared at him in bemusement. "I thought we were supposed to be sorting things out."

"Nope." Harry grinned. "It can wait until tomorrow."

Suddenly feeling much more relaxed, Cassandra flopped happily onto Harry's sofa. "Uncle James has just dragged Katherine off. Somehow I don't think she's going to be drinking wine."

Harry laughed. "Neither do I."

Cassandra took the glass of wine that Harry had poured for her. "So how are things with you and Tonks?"

Harry grimaced. "She dumped me a couple of nights ago."

"I'll take my foot out of my mouth, and start again." Cassandra remarked wryly. "Do you like your new rooms?"

"Cassandra, it's fine to talk about Tonks. Even though I wasn't expecting it to end so abruptly, I knew the relationship would come to

an end eventually.” Harry sat down next to her. “Enough about my poor track record. How are things progressing with you and Alex?”

Cassandra blushed prettily. “He’s supposed to be in London at the weekend, so I’m going out to dinner with him then.”

“Do you think there’ll be a whirlwind romance like Mione and Thomas had?” Harry teased.

Cassandra stuck her tongue out at him. “I doubt that very much. We haven’t even kissed yet.”

“I’m surprised to hear that.” Harry knew from H.J. that Cassandra and Alex had spent almost all the time Cassandra had been in Sydney together.

“All of our time was spent in the company of others.” Cassandra pointed out. “But I’m hopeful for Saturday night.”

Harry felt obliged to warn Cassandra. “Just make sure he doesn’t try anything he shouldn’t.”

“Dad’s already given me the lecture, so don’t worry.” Cassandra knew that Harry was simply trying to look out for her.

Harry guessed that Sirius would have warned his daughter. “I just want to make sure you’ll be okay.”

The two then spent the next couple of hours just talking generally about family and friends before Cassandra yawned. “I think it’s time I headed for bed.”

“I’m having breakfast in here at nine.” Harry took Cassandra’s empty glass. “Join me, and we’ll make a start on what we need to get done before the little horrors arrive later in the day.”

“I will.” Cassandra bid Harry goodnight and headed back to her rooms to discover that Katherine still wasn’t back.

Cassandra showered and got ready for bed. Just as she decided that she may as well get some sleep, Katherine came into the bedroom. "Dad's going to be a nightmare. How did your time with Harry go?"

"We picked desks and drank wine." Cassandra snuggled down under the covers. "A perfect start to the school year if you ask me."

"Some people have all the luck." Katherine wished her friend goodnight and headed into the bathroom.

Two Weeks Later

Friday night found a thoroughly miserable Tonks sitting on the sofa in H.J.'s house talking to Hermione Granger. "I think I've made a huge mistake finishing with Harry, Hermione."

"You're still in love with him, aren't you?" Hermione passed a large glass of wine over to Tonks who gratefully took it.

"Sadly yes." Tonks took a large mouthful of the wine. "But I know Harry doesn't feel the same way."

"I'm sorry." Hermione knew that Harry didn't, as she'd been the one to listen to him after he'd returned from Tonks' the day they'd broken up.

"I was such an idiot. I should have waited. He might have changed his mind." Tonks lamented.

"Do you truly believe that?" Hermione asked quietly.

Tonks knew she was kidding herself. "No. I know he's never going to feel like that about me, and I think that's what hurts the most. Knowing that somewhere out there, there's someone who he can love." Tonks gave a slightly watery smile. "Why couldn't it have been me?"

"I think I know the answer to this one." Hermione remembered asking H.J. a similar question after her mother died. "It's because he couldn't see what a great girl you actually are."

Tonks put down her glass of wine and blew her nose. "Damn right I am." She smiled at Hermione. "So how do you fancy coming out with me tomorrow night?"

"I'm not really the party type." Hermione knew she'd be totally out of her depth as Tonks sometimes intimidated her, and she'd heard from Harry that Tonks' friends tended to be even wilder than Tonks herself. "And I'm sort of seeing someone."

Tonks' face lit up. "You kept that quiet."

"That's because we've only really shared a few kisses and been out to dinner twice." Hermione gave an excited but nervy smile.

Tonks wanted more details. "So who is it?"

"H.J." Hermione dipped her head shyly as she said his name.

"Damn!" Tonks grinned. "You bagged a hot one there."

"I haven't bagged him." Hermione's face was flaming. "We've only really just begun to see each other, and now he's back at Hogwarts I'll only get to see him every other weekend until Christmas. He should actually have been here this weekend, but Cammie hurt herself so he stayed at Hogwarts."

"Is she alright?" Tonks liked the young girl and they'd exchanged letters a couple of times, even though she'd split up with Harry.

"She'll be fine." Hermione assured Tonks. "H.J. only stayed because she fell off her broom trying to imitate him. I think he felt guilty."

"So you're on your own?" Tonks settled back into the sofa.

"All weekend." Hermione reiterated.

"I know you don't want to go partying so how about coming shopping with me tomorrow instead?" Tonks offered. "I need to cheer myself up. If you're up for it, I'll stay over."

"I'd love to." Hermione was delighted by the offer as she had been feeling a little lonely. "I got my first paycheck yesterday." Hermione didn't mention the substantial sum she'd found deposited in her Gringotts account which she knew had come from Draco Malfoy. She was still looking for the right charity to give it to as she didn't want his money.

"How are you finding working in the Children's Library?" Tonks had tipped Hermione off to the job.

"I love it." Hermione's face was aglow. "The children are just like little sponges. They seem to hang onto every word when I'm telling them stories."

"Now you know why I do the job I do." Tonks finished her glass of wine. "Let me nip home. I've got a couple of bottles of wine and I'll get my pajamas."

Hermione refilled her own glass as she waited. She'd never been so happy ever before; not only had she got a boyfriend, but a job she loved and now, she thought, a new friend.

Tonks was back within moments. "Right. Let's talk shopping."

October 11th 2003

Cassandra looked up from the pile of marking on her desk. "Are you sure you aren't giving me the most to do because you're tired from your transformation last night?"

Even though he was weary, Harry shook his head. "No I've taken the brunt of it but if you don't shut up I can give you extra."

Cassandra used her trademark response to Harry, and stuck her tongue out at him. "I don't think so but it just seems to be neverending."

Harry was fed up with marking as well. "I think we can finish this tomorrow."

Relieved, Cassandra put down her quill. "So do want to go sit down somewhere more comfortable?"

Harry did, and followed Cassandra through into the girls' suite. "Where are Luna and Katherine?"

"Katherine and Orion are where they usually are." Cassandra nodded her head towards the bedroom. "Kissing on Katherine's bed, and Luna is no doubt in the Room with Xander." She sat down. "I'll let you get me a glass of wine."

Harry bowed mockingly. "Yes, Ma'am. Would you rather go and sit in my rooms if they're in there?"

"I think I would." Cassandra got back up and took the glass of white wine once Harry had poured it out, before following Harry into his rooms. Once there, Cassandra settled herself onto the sofa. "Do you want to hear something strange?"

"Make my day." Harry prompted.

"Draco Malfoy asked me to the Yule Ball this morning after breakfast." Cassandra watched surprise cross Harry's face.

"And?" Harry waited to find out what Cassandra's answer had been.

"I said no." Cassandra had been stunned that Draco had even asked her given that he knew that she was friends with Mione.

"He's not been the same since he returned to school, has he?" Harry had noticed that the boy was pretty much keeping himself to himself.

"I think that what happened at Mione's wedding has something to do with it." Cassandra swirled her wine around in her glass. "Harry, can I talk to you about something Dad told me about that day?"

Harry knew that she obviously needed to talk to someone. "Go ahead then."

Cassandra became serious. "Dad told me that Draco Malfoy spent a week in a Muggle hospital in Sydney recovering from a severe beating before being transferred to St. Mungo's for healing."

"I'm already aware of that. Sirius told me after it had happened." Sirius had filled Harry in after hearing about it from the Australian Auror Division who'd contacted Sirius because of strange occurrences at the hospital. After Draco had regained consciousness they'd realized he was English, and as per regulations, had contacted Sirius. "And H.J. also told me that it made the news headlines in Sydney particularly as no-one knew who Draco was as he refused to tell them."

"Weren't you surprised when Dad said that Lucius didn't get Draco out?" Cassandra asked.

"Not exactly, seeing as I presumed it was Lucius who put him in there in the first place." Harry, as well as Sirius, believed Lucius had been the person behind his son's injuries.

Cassandra, however, thought differently. "I know that when Dad spoke to Lucius presuming he didn't know about Draco, Lucius told him it was a family matter. But Harry, I don't think Lucius did it. I actually think it was Thomas who did it to him."

Harry doubted it. "Sirius and I both discussed this in detail, and we're pretty sure it was Lucius. What makes you suspect Thomas?"

"Because Malfoy slapped Thomas' bride of just a few hours as well as attacking a guest at his parents' estate. If you've spoken to Dad then you know what Thomas threatened Draco with after he found out." Cassandra looked expectantly at Harry who simply nodded to confirm her suspicions. "I know from what H.J. told me, that Mione said that Thomas was only going to talk to Draco, but I think it went further than that. Do you honestly think Lucius would open himself up to criticism by sending Draco to a Muggle hospital of his own accord?"

Harry mulled over what Cassandra had told him as she'd made a very good observation. "I still don't think Thomas did it, but if that's

true, then Thomas can be a nasty piece of work when he wants to be.”

Cassandra felt uneasy at Harry's response. “I've had a bad feeling ever since Dad told me about Lucius refusing to get Draco out.” Cassandra then told Harry what was worrying her most. “What if we're wrong about who Thomas might be, Harry, and that's why Lucius wouldn't get Draco out?”

Harry frowned. “You can't honestly still suspect that Thomas is Voldemort.”

Cassandra reluctantly nodded. “Luna said when she first met him that he gave her chills, and she didn't mean of a good kind. But she changed her mind. If it was Thomas who did that to Malfoy, and I believe it was, then he beat him until he was half dead. It's not exactly the act of a civilized man.”

Harry smiled ruefully. “Not exactly no but that doesn't make him Voldemort. I'm not sure how I'd have reacted if I'd been in Thomas' shoes, so you may as well tag me up as Voldemort as well.”

Cassandra acknowledged Harry's point. “Just forget about what I said then. It's probably just my overactive imagination.”

Harry then enquired about Cassandra's love life. “While we're on the subject of Thomas, what happened between you and his brother? You went out to dinner once or twice and you haven't said anything about him since.”

Cassandra pulled a face. “Alex wanted a little more than I was willing to give.”

Harry understood immediately. “So he dumped you because you wouldn't sleep with him?”

“You've got it in one.” Cassandra shrugged. “To be honest I wasn't that bothered. It's not as if we were going to see a lot of each other with him living in Australia and me here.”

"I'm sorry." Harry knew that Cassandra had quite liked Thomas' younger brother. "I bet Sirius wasn't too upset about it though."

Cassandra laughingly shook her head. "I think Dad would like me to remain single forever."

Harry knew where Sirius was coming from. "All fathers are like that with their daughters."

Cassandra changed the subject, not wanting Harry to get upset if he began to think about his own family that he'd left behind. "Now onto my second surprise invitation to the Yule Ball. Harry Potter asked me as well."

Harry could see that even though she didn't particularly like either of the boys, it was definitely good for Cassandra's self-confidence. "And what did you tell him?"

"As he and Draco don't really appear to be speaking, he was alone and looking miserable. And as much as I hate to admit it, he asked me in a manner that was both dignified and polite, so I told him I'd think about it." Cassandra wanted Harry's opinion. "So do you think I should go with Harry Potter?"

"It's only one evening, and with what's happened to Draco, Harry might need someone he trusts to talk to." Harry was willing to cut the kid a break. "I'd say yes but make sure he knows that it's not a date of a romantic nature if that's not what you're looking for."

"Don't worry on that score." Cassandra got up and refilled her glass. "Did I tell you I ran into Tonks last Saturday when I went shopping in London?"

Harry shook his head. "How is she?"

"Well she said to tell you that you were right and you weren't worth it." Cassandra laughed. "She's got a new boyfriend. A mechanic, whatever that is, named Dave."

"I take it she's back to the old 'I don't want hearts and roses' routine." Harry was glad that Tonks seemed to have moved on.

"Well as Dave's her third boyfriend in a fortnight, I'd say so." Cassandra used the term 'boyfriend' loosely.

"Ouch." Harry understood exactly what Tonks was doing. "Did you tell her how miserable I'm making your life?"

"Of course." Cassandra sent a sly look at Harry. "Only I was much ruder than that."

Harry wagged his finger. "Don't forget I'm still your boss."

"Yeah, right." Cassandra was totally deferential to Harry when they were in the classroom but outside of it, she treated him just like one of her friends. "Harry, why didn't it work out with you and Tonks? I thought you two both liked each other."

"You really want to know?" Harry asked.

"If you want to tell me." Harry and Cassandra had started to use each as sounding boards when, after working together for just two weeks, they had found that they each could speak freely and openly with the other without being feeling as if they were being judged.

Harry poured out some more wine for himself. "You know I was married to Seville after Mione died, don't you?"

"Yes." Cassandra couldn't quite see the connection but let Harry continue.

Harry sat back down. "I went through woman after woman before marrying Seville. I bought them gifts, took them out to dinner, made love to them but at the end of the day when they began to get attached to me, I finished it."

Cassandra didn't understand why he'd told her about the other women when she'd asked about Tonks. "So what point are you trying to make, Harry?"

Harry sighed. "That because I couldn't commit, I usually ended up hurting almost everyone I got involved with."

"I find that hard to believe." Cassandra thought that Harry was being hard on himself.

Harry decided to show her how wrong she was. "Okay then I'll give you an example. I was dating Pansy Parkinson in my world when I told her I had something special to ask her. She thought I was going to ask her to marry me. I was actually asking her to go as my date to Seville's wedding. When she got upset, I coolly told her she knew what she'd gotten into and I was only seeing her for sex. I then told her that I'd never love anyone else other than Mione. You can only imagine how that must have felt for her."

Cassandra stared thoughtfully at Harry. "Did you tell Pansy it was only about sex when you started seeing her and how you felt about Mione?"

"Yes." Harry admitted. "But somewhere along the way the message got lost."

"If she chose to ignore it, then that wasn't your fault, Harry." Cassandra also had another question. "You mentioned Seville's wedding. Was she married to someone else before you?"

Harry shook his head. "No. She called off the wedding a few days before it was due to take place when she realized she couldn't marry her fiancé."

"So let me get my facts straight." Cassandra sat forward. "You were married to Mione but after she died you pretty much became a serial womanizer because you still loved her and you felt that you couldn't love anyone else. And Seville, who's Voldemort's daughter, was once engaged to someone else but broke it off, and she then married you."

Harry winced a little at Cassandra's blunt delivery but had to acknowledge the truth of her words. "That about sums things up."

Cassandra vocalized the step that was missing. "So how did you end up married to Seville then if you couldn't love anyone else?"

"I got her pregnant." Harry looked a little embarrassed. "I don't think I'd have ever married her otherwise."

"Didn't you love her?" Cassandra knew that she wouldn't have wanted to be married to someone who didn't love her.

Harry shook his head. "Not like she deserved to be loved."

"Did she love you?" When wine ran down her fingers as she leant further forward, Cassandra realized she'd forgotten about her glass in her hand, enthralled in what Harry was telling her.

"Yes. She told me the first time we slept together. I think she thought I was asleep but I still heard her." Harry knocked back the rest of his wine "Do you mind if I have something stronger?"

"Go ahead." Cassandra could tell it was hard for Harry to tell her this.

Harry poured out a very large scotch before sitting back down. "Don't get me wrong. I did care about her, I was attracted to her and respected her but I was never truly utterly and totally in love with her."

"Is that why you left in the end?" Cassandra asked softly.

"It's one of the reasons." Harry took a large mouthful of the scotch. "I don't know what I really expected to happen the day I did. Part of me expected to die; it was just hope that made me believe that there might be something more."

"Was your marriage truly that awful that you'd risk your own life?" Cassandra hadn't known that Harry had expected to die.

"It wasn't awful but I never felt really happy with Seville. Only my children made me feel that way." Harry could see his remark had thrown Cassandra. "I know I still left them, but I knew that they would be cared for, which is why I didn't leave until I was totally sure of that."

"I'm sorry, Harry." Cassandra could see the anguish on Harry's face as he thought about his children. "It must hurt that you left them, only for things not to work out with Mione."

"When we first split up and for the next few months afterwards it did but I've now come to accept that I've had my time with Mione." Harry smiled at Cassandra. "Tonks, who was the reason behind this whole depressing conversation, helped me face that fact."

"So, why did you split up with Tonks?" Cassandra took the conversation back to the start.

"Because even though I'm no longer in love with Mione, I can't love Tonks either." Harry gave a sigh. "She ended it with me because she knew that."

"She fell for you, didn't you?" Cassandra surmised.

"Yes." Harry got up. "If I'd realized, I would have finished with her long before then."

"So you're going to revert to your old self?" Cassandra found she didn't like the idea of Harry being like that.

Harry shook his head. "I think I'm simply going to avoid any romantic entanglements for a very long time until I'm sure I'm not going to hurt the person I'm with."

"You're going to be awfully lonely if you do that." Cassandra observed.

"Not while I've got friends like you to listen to me ramble on, I won't." Harry kissed Cassandra's cheek. "Thank you for listening to me."

"You listened to me first, so I think we're even." Cassandra picked up her half full wineglass. "I think I'm actually going to call it a night, Harry, and throw my brother out of my bedroom before he gets into trouble for missing curfew."

"I'll see you at breakfast." Harry closed the door behind Cassandra as she left.

November 8th 2003

Thomas stood up. "If you ladies will excuse us, we'll rejoin you shortly. We just have a little business to attend to."

Mione smiled lovingly at Thomas. "We're probably going to take a walk on the beach. The moon's almost full so it will be nice down there."

Petra got up. "Shall we?"

The two women left in one direction and the men in the other. Thomas led the two men with him into his study. "I take it you have some news for me."

"We do." Regulus sat down.

"And?" Thomas poured out malt whiskey for Regulus and scotches for himself and his other guest.

The man taking the scotch sat down. "I think I've located what you're looking for. They're called the Four Pillars. The first one isn't even supposed to exist."

Thomas gave a smirk. "Neither is the Verto Corpus but it does."

"Quite true." The guest smiled up at Thomas. "The first of the Pillars is actually the well-known and much rumored object, the Fountain of Youth."

Thomas looked at the man in amazement. "The same Fountain of Youth the Muggle explorer Ponce de Leon looked for in Florida?"

The man was surprised. "You know your Muggle history."

Having been taught it at the school linked to the orphanage he'd grown up in, Thomas was aware of more than some people might give him credit for. "I do indeed. Please continue."

The man took a mouthful of the scotch before continuing. "However, contrary to the legend I don't believe the Foundation lies somewhere within South Florida, as from what I've read, I've come to the conclusion that it's a spell, not an object. I need to do more research however."

Thomas knew that they could begin to hone in on it later; right now he wanted to know about the remaining Pillars. "And the rest?"

"The second Pillar is a power base known as the Validus Saxus." The man could see that Thomas had a question and hesitated.

"What exactly is it? A stone or a rock?" Thomas guessed at some kind of stone but he wasn't sure what.

"Close." The man informed him. "If my research is correct, then it's a large uncut ruby of mythical proportions and it lies somewhere in Myanmar. I'm afraid at the moment I can't be more specific about its exact location."

"What of the other two?" Thomas wanted to hear more.

"The third is a key, but I don't believe it's a key in the true sense of the word, more that it's a way of opening something. It's called the Clavis de Propylaeum." The man had been unable to determine what form it took. "I'll need to look more into it but all of the records I've reviewed would indicate that it's currently held by a magical authority. I'd guess at the Ministry of Magic either here or in France."

Regulus glanced over at Thomas. "I assume that you'll be paying my brother a visit."

"You assume correctly." Thomas confirmed. "And you can also assume that my newest property will be receiving its first houseguest if I don't get what I want when I do."

The man, however, disappointed Thomas with his final comment. "But I'm afraid I have no idea as yet what constitutes the Fourth Pillar."

"I know." A woman's voice interrupted the men.

Thomas looked up. "Atropos."

"Thomas." Atropos smiled seductively at him. "Tired of your wife yet?"

"No, and I never will be." Thomas informed her. "I'm not really in the mood for your games, so let's get down to business. You're here to trade for the information, aren't you?"

"I am." Atropos helped herself to a glass of scotch and sashayed over to Regulus before sitting down on his lap. "Hello, Regulus."

Regulus had heard about Atropos but little more than that. "Atropos, make yourself comfortable."

"I intend to." Atropos wrapped her arm around Regulus' neck.

"When you two have finished flirting, I would like my information." Thomas remarked drily.

"For the information I want dominion over my sisters, who under no circumstances are to be hurt or disposed of." Atropos shivered as Regulus wrapped his arm around her waist, his hand coming to rest just below her breasts.

The man sitting opposite frowned. "I thought you were immortal and therefore couldn't die."

"Right now thanks to a certain artifact, I'm both mortal and immortal." Atropos informed him. "But that can change. For someone like me, immortality can be revoked."

"Why are you freely telling Thomas this?" Regulus asked.

"Because Thomas and I have an agreement, and it's something he will eventually discover on his own." Atropos ran her thumb over Regulus' bottom lip. "Are you doing anything when you've finished here?"

"The information, Atropos." Thomas interjected. "If he wants to bed you, then he knows where his room is, and he's free to use it once I have what I want."

"Do you agree to my terms?" Atropos replaced her thumb with her mouth.

Thomas rolled his eyes before hesitating. "No. I want to know first why you want dominion over your sisters, and why they should remain unharmed."

Atropos ended the kiss. "Because together we control birth, life expectancy and death, and I need all three of us well and unharmed for that to happen."

"So if I was to agree to grant you dominion over them, you'd have that control to yourself." Thomas could now see why Atropos was so eager to obtain control.

"I would." Atropos glanced over at Thomas. "Do you want more than your information for granting my request?"

"I want the final say on certain individuals' life expectancies." Thomas waited to see what Atropos would say.

"I can do that." Atropos suspected that Thomas was talking about Mione. "So are we agreed?"

"We are." Thomas raised an eyebrow. "And the Fourth Pillar is?"

"It's a cartouche." Atropos finally gave Thomas what he wanted. "Actually it's a set of them, and together they form a sort of map which will guide you when you need to use the Propylaeum. They're called the Cartouche de Multiplex Mundus. I'm not sure where they're situated though. The last known place was Cairo so you might want to check out the Museum."

"That's all you know?" Thomas wanted to make sure she wasn't omitting anything.

"It is." Atropos then quite rudely turned her back on Thomas and swiveled round to face Regulus. "Will your wife miss you for the next hour or so?"

"No." Regulus knew that Petra wouldn't miss him if he disappeared permanently. "Why?"

Atropos leant forward and whispered something in Regulus' ear. "So?"

Regulus glanced over at Thomas. "Would you mind terribly if I excused myself, Thomas?"

"Be my guest." Thomas wasn't surprised that Regulus had taken up Atropos' offer. Even though he'd rejected her, Thomas couldn't deny that the woman was indeed beautiful.

Regulus smiled and vanished with Atropos. The man left with Thomas stood up. "I'll let you know when I find anything else out."

Thomas walked over to his desk and unlocked it. "I want this returned when you've finished with it as we agreed."

"I've already given you my word that I'll do that." The man took the object that Thomas had extracted from the desk. "Now I think we'd better rejoin the ladies, and explain to Petra that her husband has deserted her."

"I'm sure Petra will be glad that Regulus has done exactly that." Thomas knew that Regulus' wife had only agreed to accompany him out of curiosity, as there was little love lost between the couple. "But I'd be careful as you're probably next on her list."

"I'll remember that." The man grimaced slightly. "But Petra is most definitely not my type. I prefer my female companions to show a little more decorum."

"As do I." Thomas followed the man out and closed the door behind him.

One Week Later

Remus apparated home to find the house quiet. "Rupert?"

No noise came from inside the house. Remus frowned. He'd arranged to meet Rupert at 10 o'clock and when he hadn't shown up two hours later, Remus had begun to get worried. Pushing open the kitchen door, Remus found the room empty. Making his way upstairs, he could see that Rupert's door was ajar. Pushing it open, Remus let out a gasp. "Rupert!"

Rupert was sitting in a chair, his eyes staring vacantly ahead. Remus could tell he was, however, still alive. "Rupert?"

Rupert didn't respond, so Remus pulled his brother to his feet. Rupert obediently stood up and let Remus wrap his arm around him and apparate them both to St. Mungo's.

An hour later a shocked Remus was being comforted by Sirius. "I don't know what to say."

"Why would anyone do this to him?" Remus was totally bereft.

"Remus." Mione came running into the room and pulled Remus into a hug. "I'm so sorry."

Remus let Mione hold him, burying his face in her hair. "Thanks for coming."

"I came as soon as I got your message. I was in a meeting and Melanie didn't want to interrupt me." Mione had taken on a secretary of her own as her work under Remus had expanded exponentially over the previous month.

Remus finally let Mione go. "I'm just glad you came."

"Where else would I be?" Mione took Remus' hand as they sat down. "You're my friend, and you've always been here for me."

"And I always will be." Remus promised as he squeezed Mione's hand.

"What's happened?" Mione knew from the note that something had happened to Rupert but not what.

Sirius explained. "Remus found Rupert in an almost catatonic state. When the healers checked him over they found his mind was like a blank slate."

Mione's free hand flew to her mouth. "Oh Merlin. Why would anyone do that to Rupert?"

"That's the worst part." Sirius gave a sigh. "When he was examined, the healers found a small mark at the back of his neck."

Mione had a sick feeling she knew what it was. "And?"

"It was the Dark Mark." Remus sounded broken. "Why would Rupert take the Dark Mark?"

"I really have no idea." Mione was reeling. "He worked with Muggles all the time. Is there really nothing you can get from his mind that would even hint at why?"

"It's been wiped." Sirius reiterated. "Rupert is essentially a living, breathing shell with no memory of who or what he is."

"Does Anna know yet?" Mione thought of Rupert's fiancée.

"Yes." Remus grimaced. "She's being comforted by her father."

"It has to have been Voldemort who did it given the Dark Mark on his neck." Mione theorized. "But why?"

"Rupert's mind contains a great deal of things. Perhaps there's something in there he was after." Remus suggested.

"But why rip it out of his mind?" Mione couldn't understand the logic. "If Rupert was a Death Eater, although I still find it hard to believe, he would have given up the information willingly."

"I'm afraid I don't have any answers." Sirius was at a loss. "All I can do now is make a report and hope that we find some way of reversing the process."

"You heard what Healer Chiswick said, Sirius." Remus stood up. "His mind has been destroyed beyond repair. Unlike Dae in Mione's world, there's nothing left to even work with. He'll be a living shell for the remainder of his life."

"You do know that the healers can end his life, don't you?" Sirius said quietly.

"That's not going to happen." Remus snapped. "Even though I know it's a long shot, what if like Mione, we do find some sort of answer and I've had him executed in the meantime. I couldn't live with myself."

"I'm sorry, Remus." Sirius placed a hand on his friend's arm. "I didn't mean to upset you."

"I know." Remus briefly hugged Sirius. "I'm going to head home."

Mione shook her head. "No you're not. You're coming home with me. We can use the office Thomas had built for me on the Island. I need an hour or so to pick up whatever I need to get through the rest of this week as well as cancelling any meetings."

Remus hadn't really wanted to return to his house, and was grateful for Mione's intervention. "Thank you. I do need to pack some things though."

"I'll come with you." Sirius offered, before turning to Mione. "If you can do whatever is necessary at work, we'll meet you at Grimmauld Square in an hour."

"Just apparate directly into the hallway." Mione left the two men alone.

The two men walked in silence to the apparition point before apparating out to Remus' home. Once Remus had packed, Sirius turned to him. "If you need anything, just let me know."

Remus was grateful for Sirius' concern. "Don't worry I will but I'm sure Mione and Thomas will take good care of me."

"Do you want me go to Grimmauld Square with you?" Sirius didn't just want to abandon his friend.

"I'll be fine. Get off." Remus hugged Sirius and then apparated away.

19th November 2003

Cassandra walked into the office to find a large box of chocolates and champagne sitting on her desk. She picked up the note that accompanied them.

'A belated Happy Birthday to the best assistant I've ever had. And a big thank you for taking care of my classes for me!

Harry x'

Cassandra smiled happily. Harry had come down with a very serious case of Muggle flu and he still hadn't recovered from it. Cassandra had therefore offered to step into his shoes to take care of his classes. Knocking on Harry's door, she found him lying on his sofa, a blanket over him. "Aren't you going down to the Great Hall?"

Harry shook his head. "I'm still not feeling great and the last thing I want to do is to listen to a room full of idiot children."

"You're still feeling grumpy aren't you? You sound just like Severus." Cassandra pulled out a chair and helped herself to some cereal before pouring out a cup of tea. "So does this mean that you're not going to be teaching today?"

Harry just looked at her. "You are joking aren't you?"

"Yep." Cassandra hesitated before starting on her cereal. "I want to say thank you for the flowers and the champagne, but I'd like to point out that I'm the only assistant you've ever had."

Harry grinned. "But you're still the best one."

Cassandra stuck out her tongue at Harry. "Of course I am Harry."

Harry shivered and pulled the blanket more securely around himself. "I'm sorry I couldn't get out of bed to give them to you before now but Madam Pomfrey refused to let me out the ward. She didn't trust me not to infect anyone else."

Cassandra frowned as she thought that Harry really should still have stayed in the ward. "I know how sick you've been, Harry. You really didn't have to do it."

"I wanted to." Harry assured her. "Now finish your cereal. You're going to need all your energy to deal with the little horrors for me."

Cassandra pushed the barely eaten food away, her mind already on the day ahead. "Before I go, I just wanted to let you know that I've finished everything you asked me to, so do you need anything else doing?"

"Nothing apart from taking the classes today and probably tomorrow." Harry assured her. "Remus has owed me to say that he'll be in tomorrow to cover the seventh year class."

"Has Dad found any leads on his brother yet?" Cassandra had been horrified when she'd learnt about what had happened to Rupert Giles.

"I'm afraid not." Harry didn't expect Sirius to after what Sirius had told him. "And Remus' note didn't really say anything."

"Poor Uncle Remus." Cassandra felt sorry for Remus and it showed on her face.

Harry decided to try and cheer Cassandra up. "We both need cheering up, so how about going to see a movie on Saturday. Sirius

wants me to check in with him about seven, so we can grab something to eat after I've done that."

"I'd love to watch a movie." Cassandra was a huge fan of Muggle movies after Harry had taken her to see her first one after offering her the position as his assistant. "Look, I can see you still don't feel well so why don't you go get back into bed?"

Harry was fed up with staying in bed. "You won't take no for answer will you?"

"Absolutely not." Cassandra shooed Harry back into his bedroom. "Now go lie down and keep warm."

"Thanks Mum." Harry imitated Cassandra's earlier gesture and stuck out his tongue, only to start coughing.

"That will teach you." Cassie closed the door on him and went off to find her notes.

November 21st 2003

Mione looked up to find Remus staring at her. "Is something wrong?"

"I don't know." Remus had been thinking about what had happened in class the previous afternoon. "Mione, please don't take this the wrong way, but do you think that Thomas had anything to do with what happened to Draco Malfoy at your wedding?"

Mione knew that Remus wouldn't intimate such a thing without good reason. "What makes you ask?"

"Yesterday when I went in to take the seventh year class, while I was waiting for everyone to arrive, Harry Potter asked me how I was doing." Remus knew that it would get out what had happened to Rupert. "I said that I was doing okay and that I was staying with you and Thomas here for the week. As I mentioned Thomas' name, I saw Draco Malfoy start. I could also smell his fear at the mere mention of Thomas' name."

Mione frowned. "I thought Lucius had done it to him."

Remus could sense he'd upset Mione. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to distress you."

"It's just that Thomas has never even so much as raised his voice in my presence." Mione rubbed her arms up and down. "Do you think he did it?"

"I honestly don't know." Remus answered truthfully. "Do you?"

"No." Mione couldn't believe that Thomas could act so ruthlessly. "I really believe it was Lucius."

"Well you know Thomas better than any of us." Remus patted Mione's shoulder. "I'm sorry I brought it up."

"It's okay Remus." Mione returned to her work.

Later that night – The Island

Thomas glanced up as Mione walked into his bedroom. "I was expecting you hours ago."

"Sorry, we're still more than a little behind with everything that's happened." Mione hurried over to kiss her husband. "I suppose it's too much to hope that the twins are still awake."

"I'm afraid Teresa put them down to sleep several hours ago." Thomas could see the disappointment on Mione's face when she discovered that the children's nanny had already put them to bed.

"I won't go in then." Mione didn't want to disrupt the twins' sleep cycle as they'd started to sleep through the night a few weeks earlier. "I really did want to see them."

"You can see them in the morning." Thomas commiserated with his wife. "Have you eaten?"

"The house elves fixed us some sandwiches." Mione headed into the bathroom. When she came out, Thomas was still awake and reading. "Thomas, can I ask you something?"

Thomas could tell it was something serious from Mione's tone. "What is it?"

"Draco Malfoy." Mione slid into bed next to him. "Was it you?"

"What makes you bring this up now?" Thomas didn't answer the question immediately, and responded with one of his own instead.

"When Remus went to Hogwarts yesterday, he said that Draco started when he mentioned that he'd been staying with you and me." Mione explained.

Thomas was a little puzzled. "Why would Remus tell Draco that?"

"He didn't." Mione fluffed up her pillows as she talked. "Harry Potter asked Remus how he was coping after the attack on Rupert, and he told Harry that he was doing okay and that he was staying with us. Apparently Draco overheard."

"And Remus mentioned it to you?" Thomas put down his book.

"Just in passing." Mione didn't want to make a big deal of it. "So, is it true?"

"Yes." Thomas watched shock and horror flow across Mione's face.

"Why?" Mione couldn't hide her distress.

"Because of what he did." Thomas could see tears in Mione's eyes. "I gave him a choice of working off what he did at my parents' Muggle farm, or facing me in a duel. He made the wrong choice."

Mione felt a small amount of relief at discovering that Thomas simply hadn't beaten Draco to a pulp. "Still, don't you think you were a little severe on him?"

Thomas didn't. "I'm sorry but I'm not going to apologize for doing that to the boy. He tried to rape a guest and attacked you. I'm sure he'll think twice about doing either again now."

"Did you send him to the Muggle hospital?" Mione asked quietly.

"Yes." Thomas wasn't going to lie to her about his involvement. "He deserved it. Tell me how you would feel if it had been our daughter in your friend's shoes."

Mione scowled. "That's hardly a fair comparison."

"I disagree." Thomas argued. "It could so easily have been any of the female guests who Draco picked on. They're all somebody's daughter."

As much as she hated what he'd done, Mione knew Thomas was right. "I concede the point but I still find it upsetting to know that you could do that to somebody."

"I regret that I've upset you but nothing else." Thomas wasn't going to back down from his stance. "Mione, any man who loves his wife would defend her in the same way."

Mione noticed that he didn't mention Hermione. "So you're actually saying that you did it to him because of me, and not really because of Hermione?"

"No." Thomas had also been angry with Draco because he'd been forced to extend his protection to Hermione but he wasn't going to tell Mione that. "Look, I can't take it back nor do I want to. I'm sorry if that upsets you but it's who I am."

Mione got out of bed. "I'm going to get some fresh air."

Thomas lay back and watched as Mione slipped on her robe and disappeared onto the verandah. He had a feeling he'd be sleeping alone that night.

Next Chapter: Sirius receives an unwelcome visit; Harry gets a new best friend; Mione shares her worries with Remus.

Chapter 23: Attack

November 22nd 2003

Knowing that Harry was going to be arriving soon, Sirius headed up the corridor and opened the door to his office. At the sight that met his eyes he'd unholstered his wand a lot faster than anyone in the room expected. "Reducto, Reducto, Reducto."

Of the group of six white masked men, one wasn't quite quick enough to throw up a shield which proved fatal to him as one of Sirius' spells connected with his head.

Sirius was backing up into the hallway when a small crack sounded behind him and a voice said stupefy. Sirius then knew no more until he came round in his office where he found himself face to face with a gold-masked man, who he knew from Harry's memory was Dominus. "What the hell do you want?"

"I want to know where the Clavis de Propylaeum is." Dominus didn't bother to procrastinate as he sat in Sirius' own chair.

"I've never heard it." Sirius lied. "And even if I had, you know very well that I'm not going to tell you."

"I'll give you one more opportunity to tell me before I'm forced to rip its location from your mind." Even as he made his demand, Dominus knew that Sirius wasn't simply going to proffer the information up to him.

"Go to hell." Sirius struggled against his captors as he wondered why no-one had responded to the sound of the mêlée. "You're not going to get away with this."

Dominus had already anticipated and planned for the event. "I'm afraid no-one is going to come and help you. I had wards erected around this floor and your office before I even attempted to deal with you."

Sirius scowled. "How do you propose to get out?"

“The same way I got in. I’m going to punch a hole through any wards that might have been erected since my arrival that aren’t mine.” Dominus informed him. “Now are you going to co-operate and tell me what I want to know?”

Sirius said nothing. Dominus slowly got up from the chair, before walking over to Sirius where he gripped his chin firmly in his hand, forcing his head up. “I suggest you relax otherwise this is likely to hurt you a great deal more than it’s already going to.”

Sirius didn’t even bother to defend his mind as he knew that the Black family ring would protect him. “Give it your best shot.”

At Sirius’ offhand response, Dominus guessed that, akin to Amicus, Sirius’ family ring would protect his mind even against his invasion. But he still had to make sure and tried to penetrate the dark mist that blanketed Sirius’ mind before determining that, as he’d suspected, Sirius’ mind was impenetrable. “In that case, we do this the hard way.” Dominus addressed the two men holding Sirius. “Hold him still.”

Dominus didn’t take out his wand and Sirius wondered why. He soon found out as he watched Dominus slip a metal device over his fingers. Dominus could see that Sirius was intrigued. “I’m not sure if you’re familiar with this. It’s actually a Muggle device but I do believe you’ll appreciate the magical enhancements I’ve made to it.”

Sirius steeled himself as he knew that he wasn’t going to escape from the two large men holding him. Sirius’ next breath left his body in a moaning grunt as Dominus’ fist connected with his stomach, a burning sensation springing to life where the knuckleduster impacted just below his ribs. Dominus didn’t give Sirius chance to recover before his fist connected with the soft tissue above Sirius’ eye. Sirius felt as if his head had exploded as hot burning pain blossomed from the open wound and radiated outwards.

Dominus stepped back. “Would you like to reconsider your refusal?” Sirius remained silent. “Turn him around.” Dominus ordered.

Sirius was roughly dragged around. He couldn't help but let out a pain filled cry as Dominus' fist connected with his lower back again and again until Sirius thought he was going to pass out. Only once Sirius was sagging between the two men, did Dominus bark out another order. "Let go of him."

Sirius collapsed to the floor and Dominus finally unholstered his wand. "Crucio."

As the spell hit him, Sirius screamed and writhed, hitting his head sharply on the table behind him, blood gushing out of his mouth as he bit through his own tongue. Dominus eventually released the spell. "So, are we going to do business?"

Sirius managed to lift his head to spit out blood at Dominus' feet. "Fuck you."

Dominus nodded at the two men. "I can't do this here. Bring him."

As Dominus appeared behind Sirius, Harry was on his way to see Sirius together with Cassandra, both completely unaware of the problem on the isolated floor of the Ministry. As he rode up in the elevator with her, Harry reminded her about his status as an Unspeakable. "Under no circumstances mention my name to anyone who might be with your Dad."

Cassandra blushed. "Sorry." She'd accidentally gone to call Harry by his name when they were walking through the Ministry entryway, only just stopping herself in time.

Harry frowned as the elevator reached the floor and the doors didn't open. "Something's wrong." He pressed the button to send the elevator back down but again nothing happened. "Damn."

"Do you know what's wrong?" Cassandra asked nervously.

"There's been a lockdown of some sort. Let me see if I can apparate us out." Harry put his arm around Cassandra's waist and swore when he couldn't apparate. He quickly pulled out his wand and checked the

elevator. "There are wards blanketing the entire elevator that shouldn't be here."

Cassandra was more than a little scared at Harry's words. "Do you think Dad is alright?"

"I don't know." Harry wished he'd left Cassandra behind while he reported to Sirius but hadn't seen any reason why she shouldn't visit her father before they went out to dinner.

Cassandra watched in silence as Harry began to mutter spell after spell, trying to bring the wards down so that he could apparate Cassandra out. Harry finally touched his ring. "That should hopefully alert the other Unspeakables and Aurors that we have a problem if they aren't already aware. Unfortunately I can't sound a general alert via the elevator panel as these wards are blocking me." Harry wasn't even sure his ring was going to work but he thought he'd got the ward down that would stop it.

After trying one final time to bring down the apparition wards, Harry gave up. "I can't get past the wards to get you out but I think I might be able to override the lockdown on the elevator. If I succeed and the doors open, get down, and whatever you do, don't follow me."

"Okay." Cassandra watched as Harry began a complex movement as he muttered something under his breath she couldn't catch.

In Sirius' office, as Sirius was being lifted from the floor, he felt his ring begin to vibrate. He knew then that either an Unspeakable or an Auror was now aware that something was wrong. Barely able to stand, and his head spinning, Sirius was able to do little except let the two men manhandle him towards the door. Suddenly the door flew open and Bella marched into the room, flanked by four of her men.

"Let go of Commander Black." Bella snarled as she recognized the man who'd attacked her several months earlier. "And whoever you are, there's going to be no apparating your way out of here this time. Our wards will soon be back in place."

“Bellatrix Black, or should I say Delaney? Congratulations on your marriage.” Dominus stepped forward. “It’s so nice to see you looking so well again. You were quite the heroine the last time we met.”

Bella ignored the man’s comments. “Drop your wands, and let go of him.”

Dominus declined. “I’m afraid we can’t do that. You see your lovely cousin has information I’m in need of.”

At his refusal, Bella didn’t hesitate. “Reducto…”

A few minutes later the elevator doors flew open to reveal a hallway littered with bodies. Cassandra glanced around Harry to see Dominus and a white-masked man being followed by two other Death Eaters who were dragging a blood coated Sirius between them. Ignoring Harry’s instructions, Cassandra tried to bolt forwards. “Dad.”

Harry reached out and grabbed Cassandra’s arm forcibly pulling her back to the rear of him. “Stay behind me, and erect the strongest shield you can.” Harry snapped, before turning back to face Dominus and the other white-masked individual. “Let him go, Dominus.”

The man drew to a halt. “You know who I am, yet I’ve no idea who you are but I can certainly warrant a guess. You have to be the man who questioned Aditi.”

Harry ignored Dominus’ statement. “I’m not going to say it again. Let him go.”

Sirius lifted his head, blood pouring down his face. “Leave me. Get Cassie out.”

Before Harry could react, a Reducto spell erupted from behind the two men holding Sirius, hitting one of them in the shoulder and forcing him to let go of Sirius as he collapsed to the floor.

It was the exact opening Sirius needed, and he smashed his head backwards splitting open both the mask of the Death Eater holding

him and his own skull. Cassandra watched in horror as both men subsequently dropped to the ground.

Harry used the distraction to take aim at the man standing at Dominus' side. "Stupefy." Harry used the basic spell as he wanted to question the man if he could capture him, and didn't want to take the chance of killing him. The man erected a shield easily blocking Harry's simple spell.

As Harry was taking on the Death Eater, Dominus turned and reached down to grab hold of Sirius himself. Even as he dueled, Harry spotted what was happening, and, fearing that Dominus would be able to apparate out with Sirius, Harry did the only thing he could and immediately blasted Sirius out of Dominus' reach. "He's going nowhere with you." Sirius flew through the air knocking over Bella who was trying to get to her feet.

Conscious he was likely going to be outclassed if he had to take on Dominus and the man in front of him together, Harry made the decision to take down the first man he'd engaged, and used the threefold spell that Lily had invented; the final spell getting through and blasting the man off his feet.

Just as Harry had dealt with the Death Eater and was about to engage Dominus, yet another Death Eater ran out from Sirius' office, and addressed Dominus. "The wards are down."

Harry took aim at the new arrival but the man erected a shield dispelling Harry's spell, just as Dominus sent a blood boiling curse at Harry, who promptly used a reflective shield to send it towards the newly arrived Death Eater who chose to duck.

As Harry engaged both Dominus and the wardbreaking Death Eater, the man who'd been blasted by Bella's spell finally got to his feet, a large chunk of shoulder missing, and Dominus disregarded Harry to snap out an order. "Get Black and get out of here."

As the Death Eater advanced on Bella and Sirius, Bella fired off a stupefy curse from where she lay. The Death Eater cursed as the spell just missed him. "Just hand over your cousin."

“Try and take him.” Bella threw yet another spell at the man, who had erected a shield and was rapidly advancing on the couple.

Using the time Dominus had given him, Harry made the decision to use the same threefold spell on the wardbreaking Death Eater. As the last spell, a Reducto, impacted the Death Eater, Harry found himself faced with a spell sent by Dominus. Unfortunately using the threefold spell twice in succession was draining on Harry who, even with his superior strength, faltered as Dominus’ overpowered blasting spell hit his shields, knocking Harry off his feet. With Harry on the floor, Dominus decided to further distract Harry by taking aim at Cassandra, who was standing in the corridor, frozen and unable to move. “Avada Kedavra.”

Knowing that Cassandra’s shield wouldn’t be able to defend against the killing curse and that he wouldn’t be able to get to his feet in time to grab her, Harry instead kicked Cassandra’s feet from under her, forcing the girl onto the ground as the green light from the spell tore over her head, impacting the wall inside the elevator behind her. With Cassandra legs now entangled with his own, Harry couldn’t get to his feet but on seeing Dominus advancing on Sirius, threw his own killing curse at the man.

Dominus, however, dodged it and pulling out a second wand, sent another spell at a rapidly weakening Bella. Having used most of her waning energy in dealing with the Death Eater intent on grabbing Sirius, the spell easily punched through her shield and disarmed her. As he used one wand to attack Bella, Dominus used the other to send yet another spell at the still prone Harry. Harry threw up the strongest shield he could as recognized the beheading curse flying towards him. Having temporarily distracted Harry, Dominus addressed the wizard who’d finally recovered from the first threefold spell Harry had used. “For Merlin’s sake, just grab Black.”

As Harry got to his feet, pulling Cassandra up to kneel behind him, he was aware of Cassandra finally reacting to the situation and firing off a stunning curse at the man who was advancing on her Dad. Turning, the man took aim at Cassandra, catching her in the shoulder with a

Reducto curse and knocking her to the ground as she didn't respond quickly enough to his attack.

Leaving Cassandra where she was, Harry pulled out his own second wand, sending curses at both Cassandra's attacker and Dominus. The spells missed both of them as the attacker ducked and Dominus twisted out of the way at the same time as he fired off what he knew would be his final curse for her at Bella, who was still trying to struggle to her feet.

Not having his wand and hearing what the curse was, Sirius reacted without thinking, and pushed Bella out of the way, taking the full brunt of the curse himself. Cassandra screamed as Sirius grabbed his throat, blood spurting between his fingers, the Iugulo spell going to work.

"Dad!" Without hesitation, Cassandra climbed angrily to her feet and aimed her wand at the gold masked man. "Avada Kedavra."

Harry knew that Cassandra was angry enough for the curse to work as did Dominus who, grabbing Cassandra's attacker by the arm, vanished. Unfortunately the man behind him wasn't so lucky and the spell hit him in the chest. The Death Eater who'd brought down the wards groaned as Harry advanced on him. However, before Harry could immobilize him, the Death Eater activated a portkey.

"Fuck." Harry swore out loud as the man vanished, before dashing over to where Sirius lay and kneeling down beside him. "Resarcio Collum." Even though he'd patched up the wound, Harry knew that Sirius didn't stand a chance if he didn't get him to a hospital. "Cassandra, get here now."

"I killed him." Cassandra couldn't stop shaking.

Harry could see that Cassandra wasn't paying attention to him and he shouted at the girl. "Cassandra!"

Finally registering Harry's voice, Cassandra looked over in his direction, her eyes falling upon the pool of blood that her Dad was lying in. "There's so much blood."

Harry got to his feet. "Cassandra, I need you to listen to me."

Cassandra continued to ignore Harry as she stared in shock at the blood. Not having much other choice, Harry gritted his teeth and slapped Cassandra across the face, startling her. "Cassandra, your Dad needs you."

"Harry?" Cassandra didn't even think about not identifying Harry as she responded to the urgency in his voice. However she still sounded dazed.

Harry took off the ring Sirius had given him for emergencies, and slid it onto Cassandra's finger. "This will take you to St. Mungo's. Hold onto your Dad. Tell the healer he's been hit by the Iuguolo spell. Do you understand what I've told you?"

"Yes." Cassandra knelt in the blood to put her hand on Sirius' arm.

"Medicus Instante." Harry sent the pair to St. Mungo's.

Bella, although conscious, was lying unmoving on the floor, unable to get up on her own. "How bad is Sirius?"

"I don't know if he'll make it." Harry cast several spells on her. "Can you stand now?"

"If you can help me up." Bella let Harry lift her to her feet. "I'm not injured too badly but I'm absolutely exhausted. I'm lucky that my vest took the brunt of the attack."

"I'm just glad you were wearing it." Harry helped Bella into his office. "Something doesn't feel right."

"What do you think..." Bella's words were cut off as an explosion ripped through the corridor, knocking both her and Harry off their feet.

Shaking dust off his cloak, Harry got back up. "I knew he gave up too easily."

"I don't call killing all of my men giving up too easily." Bella yelled as she tried to push the desk that had fallen on her injured leg off it.

"Hold still." Harry easily lifted the desk free. "Activate your ring."

"I'm not leaving." Bella hadn't seen or felt what was wrong with her leg.

"Look at your leg." Harry snapped, not having time to argue.

Bella vomited as she saw her bone sticking out from her calf. Harry repeated his earlier order. "Activate it."

"Medicus Instante." Bella vanished.

Heading back into the hallway Harry checked over the men who were lying in the corridor, but no-one had made it except for the Death Eater whose mask Sirius had cracked. As the mask was damaged, the spell holding it to the man's face had faded and it easily came away in Harry's hand. The man was staring up at Harry, looking almost as dazed as Cassandra had been, pieces of the broken mask embedded in his face from the force Sirius had used. "Goyle. I might have known." Harry immediately obliviated any knowledge of Cassandra's mention of his name, before magically handcuffing Goyle and, after turning a piece of paper into a portkey, sending Goyle directly to Azkaban. Marching up the corridor, Harry found his way was blocked by fallen debris. "Dammit." He then apparated out to the main meeting area set aside in case of an emergency.

After finishing filling in the other Unspeakables and Aurors on what had happened, Harry headed for St. Mungo's where he eventually found Cassandra sitting by her Dad's side, a nurse sitting quietly on the other side of the bed monitoring Sirius. "Cassandra?"

"Err, hi." Cassandra politely got up.

Harry couldn't remove his Unspeakable's cloak with the nurse there. "Cassandra, it's me. I just wanted to check to see how Sirius was faring."

Cassandra visibly sagged as she realized who it was, and tears started to flow. "Uncle Craig said that hopefully Dad will survive but if he does, Uncle Craig's not sure if there's going to be any lasting damage to his vocal cords."

"Come here." Harry took Cassandra into his arms and she started to cry openly. Harry held his friend until she cried herself out before erecting a privacy bubble around them so that the nurse couldn't listen to their conversation. "Cassandra, I want to apologize for slapping you earlier."

Cassandra shook her head. "It's alright. I don't think I'd have listened otherwise. I was so shocked by the sight of that much blood and at what I'd done."

Harry was glad that Cassandra didn't hold it against him. "Don't worry about what you did. It was self defense and I think you can safely assume there will be no charges against you for using the killing curse."

"That's what Uncle Albus said when I told him what had happened." Cassandra hadn't been surprised when Dumbledore had shown up less than an hour after Sirius had been admitted. Upset and in pain, she'd told him exactly what had happened, taking care this time not to mention Harry's name. Dumbledore had immediately reassured her that there would be no action against her for using an Unforgiveable. "But I still killed someone."

Harry sat Cassandra down. "Cassandra, the first time you kill someone is horrible. I've already told you about what I thought my first kill was, and you also know my first true kill, which like you, was that of a Death Eater. I'm not going to lie to you. You're going to feel terribly guilty about it for a very long time, and you'll always wonder whether you could have done anything differently."

"I know I could have done something differently. I could have used a different spell but you didn't have any other choice." Cassandra had never seen the memory of Harry's introduction to the Death Eaters by Voldemort but he'd told her about it. "Voldemort would have killed you."

"It didn't stop me second guessing whether I could have done something to prevent it." Harry admitted. "However, the worst thing for me was the feeling of enjoyment I got from killing the Death Eater. It was like a rush of power I'd never known before. It was one of the factors that contributed towards my ending up addicted to Dark Magic."

Cassandra was staggered at what Harry was openly admitting to her. "Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I need to know how it felt for you." Harry waited for Cassandra's reaction.

"I admit I did feel a rush of power but I just felt sick afterwards when I realized what I'd done." Cassandra felt tears starting again. "Harry, I don't think I can become an Auror. I froze."

"Your reaction was perfectly normal." Harry assured her. "I've seen plenty of first timers do exactly the same."

Cassandra shook her head. "It's not just that. I know I can't do that again."

"I'd give yourself some time." Harry knew that she might change her mind once she'd put the scenario into perspective. "Tell me. How is your shoulder?"

"Sore but Uncle Craig said that it will be fully healed within a day or so." Despite her brave words, Cassandra had never known such pain as the shock from the fight began to wear off and the hole in her shoulder had made itself known. Not wanting to dwell on it, Cassandra changed the subject. "I think I'm going to go and get a drink. Do you want one?"

"Why don't you stay here, and I'll go." Harry offered.

Before Cassandra could respond, however, the door to the room opened and a worried looking Craig came into the room. "Cassandra,

I'm so sorry to heap even more bad news on you but Faith was admitted a few hours ago as well."

Cassandra frowned as she stood up. "The baby?"

"When Remus went to tell her about Sirius, he found her doubled up. She's gone into labor and I've tried everything I can but I can't do anything to stop it." Craig explained.

"You're going to have to wake Dad." Cassandra was glad that Harry was with her as he put his arm around her waist to support her.

"I can't." Craig was stuck. "He's heavily sedated to keep him still."

Harry addressed Craig. "What's wrong with him? Cassandra said about his vocal cords but not much else."

Craig explained in more detail what he'd already briefly told Cassandra. "He's sustained major head injuries as well as the damage to his throat. I don't know what his attacker used on him but he had burns that had begun to sink beneath the skin as well as spread out on his face, his stomach and his back, to say nothing of the bruising his kidneys received. He's also been put under the Cruciatus curse. His throat injury caused major blood loss as well as the blood he lost from internal bleeding from the damage inflicted to his kidneys. I'm still not entirely sure he's going to make it."

Cassandra hadn't realized how truly grim Sirius' injuries were, and she paled, grabbing on tighter to Harry. "Even so, I know he'd still want to say goodbye to Faith."

"I can't wake him, Cassandra." Craig repeated. "His brain is swollen and I can't risk reopening his internal wounds. I'm afraid that even as advanced as magic is, it can still only do so much. If he stands any chance of surviving, I can't wake him."

Cassandra turned immediately to Harry. "I don't know what to do."

"I'll stay with Sirius." Harry assured Cassandra. "Go with Healer Delaney. I know you're scared but Faith is going to need you."

Craig frowned. "I'm aware you can't tell me who you are but I can't let you stay with him without some sort of confirmation of your status."

"I know who he is and the Aurors wouldn't have let him in if he hadn't got clearance." Cassandra reassured the healer. "He can stay with Dad."

Craig still wasn't entirely happy but trusted Cassandra's judgment. "Come with me."

Harry hadn't been on his own for very long when the door opened again, and Remus and James Potter walked into the room. Remus stared at Harry. "We just wanted to check on Sirius."

Harry knew that Remus couldn't tell who he was, as the cloak he wore not only hid his features but also masked his scent and magical signature. "I'm afraid it's touch and go."

Remus dropped down onto a chair, his legs refusing to hold him up any longer. "I can't believe that Sirius won't make it."

"I'm very sorry." Harry knew that on top of what had happened with Rupert, this was pushing Remus to breaking point.

James closed the door, before addressing the cloaked figure. "We can stay with him if you need to be somewhere else."

Harry guessed that James wanted to talk to Remus alone without him being there. "Thank you. I'd appreciate that. I'll let the guard outside know that you're both going to stay with him."

Harry told the two Aurors standing outside of Sirius' room that he'd be back later if possible, before apparating to his apartment. An owl was waiting for him. Wondering how the owl could have known he'd be at his apartment, Harry pulled off the letter which he found was from Remus explaining about Sirius and where Cassandra was.

Stripping off his clothes, he quickly showered before using a drying spell and getting dressed. He then walked out of the apartment and

headed for the local supermarket, where he picked up some prepackaged sandwiches, soft drinks and several magazines as he knew that it would be a very long night. After giving his name to the Aurors at the door and being divested of both of his wands, as without his Unspeakable clearance Harry wasn't allowed to keep them, Harry was let into Sirius' room.

Remus stretched as the door opened. "Harry, you got my message."

"I did." Harry handed over the carrier bags he'd unshrunk before going into the room. "I stopped off to pick up some refreshments, and something to read." Harry smiled at the nurse. "Help yourself if you want something."

The nurse shook her head. "Thanks but no."

Remus, however, took a ham salad sandwich from the pile and opened it before biting hungrily into it. "You actually just missed James."

"I'm surprised he didn't stay." Harry opened up a chicken sandwich and tucked in.

"He wanted to tell Orion and Katherine about what's happening here." Remus responded. "So I expect he'll return with Orion."

Remus' words turned out to be correct, when a short time later, a visibly upset Orion was led into the room by James, Katherine trailing behind them. Harry stepped aside to let Orion sit by Sirius, Katherine taking the seat by him and holding his hand.

The three men retreated from the room. Harry took his wands back from the Aurors before addressing Remus. "I'm going to check on Faith and Cassandra."

James and Remus headed back into Sirius' room as Harry checked to find out where Faith was. Once he reached the room the nurse had directed him to, Harry sat down outside and pulled out the magazines that he'd picked up and settled down to wait, only getting up to return to check on Sirius on a hourly basis. Sitting outside Faith's room,

even though it was soundproofed, Harry's sharp hearing could make out murmurs, and then as the night progressed, grunts and moans before a baby's weak cry split the air. Harry swallowed hard as he thought about Faith and what the baby's cry signified for her. Not wanting to leave Cassandra to face it alone, Harry stood up and knocked on the door.

Cassandra opened the door. "Harry, I thought you were staying with Dad."

"Orion, Katherine, James and Remus are there." Harry listed the people who'd stayed. "I thought you might need some support here."

Cassandra looked behind her. "Can Harry come in?"

A voice Harry recognized agreed. "Sure."

Harry's mouth fell open. "Faith?"

"Alive and kicking." Faith looked terrible though.

Harry couldn't believe it. "But how?"

Craig didn't answer immediately as he and the midwife were busy dealing with the baby, but after a few moments, he turned round to look at Harry. "I think the baby's premature arrival made all the difference." Once he'd ensured the baby's safety, Craig walked over to where a junior Healer was monitoring Faith. "Have her vitals improved?"

Healer Janis nodded. "A little."

Craig checked her himself. "Good."

"My baby?" Faith's voice was very weak.

Craig smiled. "He's going to be fine." The midwife walked over and showed the newborn to Faith. "He's going to need a little help with his breathing for a few days though."

Faith could barely lift her arm to touch her son, and Cassandra hurried over to help her. "Thanks."

"She's absolutely exhausted isn't she?" Harry watched as Faith touched the baby's face with Cassandra's help, before smiling and closing her eyes.

"Much more so than if it had been a normal birth." Craig checked Faith again. "We thought we were going to lose her at one point but from the moment the baby was out, her vitals began to stabilize."

"Thank goodness." Harry was glad to get one piece of good news.

Cassandra looked hopefully at Harry. "How's Dad? Do you know?"

"I checked on him about an hour ago. He's still stable but hasn't shown any sign of improvement." Harry said gently.

Cassandra's face fell and she sat down on the chair next to Faith's bed. "He can't die now."

Craig patted her shoulder. "He's holding his own which is good news, Cassandra. Do you want to come with me and check on him?"

"What about Faith?" Cassandra was torn as she knew that Sirius would want her to stay with his wife.

"I'll take good care of her. I think Faith is going to do little but sleep right now." Healer Janis promised. "Go see your Dad."

Harry followed the couple out of the room. When they got to Sirius' room, they found Katherine and Orion were both asleep under a blanket on a chair that someone had transfigured into a lounge for them. James had returned to Hogwarts a few hours earlier but Remus was still awake and stood up when the group came in. "The baby?"

"Both mother and baby will be fine." Craig watched a shocked but delighted expression cross Remus' face.

Remus found his legs were unsteady, and he slumped back into the chair. "Sirius is going to be beyond happy."

Craig pulled out his wand and spent the next few minutes checking Sirius over. "I think he is. His brain is still swollen but it's definitely not as bad as it was. I can't detect any more internal bleeding so that's also good news." He turned to the nurse sitting at the side of Sirius. "Can you fetch me an infusion of blood replenishing potion and some more sedative please?"

Harry watched with interest as Craig fixed up the muggle style bag to the drip that was inserted into Sirius' arm. "I take it that you got this idea from Muggles?"

"We did." Craig admitted. "Sirius isn't able to drink potions as a normal patient would and I can't massage his throat to get him to drink without causing damage."

Cassandra touched her Dad's hand. "So he's going to be alright?"

"With the way he's improving and if he continues to do so, then yes." Craig watched Cassandra's face crumple.

Harry once again provided his shoulder for the girl to cry on. "It's been a rough night for you, hasn't it?"

Katherine and Orion were both awoken by the sound of crying, and Orion immediately shot up thinking the worst. "Dad?"

Remus hurried to reassure him. "It's alright, Orion. Cassandra's just tired and relieved. We've got good news. Faith and the baby are both alright and we think your Dad will be too."

Not wanting anyone to see, Orion buried his face in his fiancée's shoulder as he also began to cry in relief. Katherine was hard pushed to hold back her own tears as she hugged Orion to her.

By the time morning came, the small group were absolutely exhausted, both physically and mentally. Harry and Remus had been both awake all night, their werewolf abilities allowing them to do so.

Cassandra lifted her head from Harry's chest as she'd fallen asleep on his lap. "Dad?"

As if in answer, Sirius groaned. Cassandra got up from Harry's lap. "Dad?"

"Don't try and speak." Remus laid a hand on Sirius' shoulder and warned his friend just in case he was conscious, even though Remus didn't think he was.

Harry slipped out of the room, returning with Craig who quickly assessed Sirius. "He's going to be fine. Even though there's still some swelling, it's most definitely going down. I'm going to give him some more sedative otherwise he's going to be in a lot of pain if he wakes up right now."

Later that morning

Just after eight o'clock, James Potter arrived and offered to take over sitting with Sirius. "Don't worry about covering classes tomorrow. I've already cancelled them."

Harry was relieved. "I'm going to head back to my apartment. Cassandra, do you want to come with me? James can let us know when your Dad wakes up."

Even though she'd managed to sleep for an hour or so, Cassandra was still exhausted. "Please."

Remus took Orion and Katherine with him and the group split up at the apparition point.

On arriving at Harry's apartment, even though she was completely shattered, Cassandra glanced quickly over it. "It's cute."

"You mean small, don't you?" Harry yawned. "I only need one bedroom and a bathroom, and I hardly ever use the kitchen so it doesn't matter how small it is."

Barely able to keep her eyes open, Cassandra dropped onto the tiny two-seater sofa. "Do you have a spare blanket?"

Harry scooped her up, making her squeal. "The sofa's far too small and uncomfortable, and being this tired, I don't exactly trust my transfiguration skills. You'd probably wake up to find the sofa had swallowed you up. So you are going to shower, and, if you think you can refrain from molesting me, I'll let you sleep in my bed with me."

Despite her tiredness, Cassandra punched Harry lightly in the shoulder, before resting her head on it. "You are not that irresistible you know."

"Bruise a man's ego as well as his shoulder, why don't you?" Harry deposited Cassandra on the ottoman in the bathroom. "I'll leave you some pajamas on the bed. I'll wait in the sitting room. You've got ten minutes."

"Thanks." Her eyes half closed, Cassandra got wearily up before starting to pull off her clothes, only to stop when Harry coughed.

"Cassandra, I know you're tired but you should at least let me leave before you start doing that." Harry grinned at her.

Cassandra shook her head. "Sorry, I didn't even think. I just want to shower and get into bed."

"I'll be back shortly." Harry walked out and closed the door behind him.

By the time the ten minutes were up and Harry entered his bedroom, Cassandra was fast asleep and tucked up in bed wearing his pajamas. Harry headed into the bathroom, smiling as he picked up Cassandra's clothes from the floor where she'd just dropped them haphazardly on her way into the shower. After showering, Harry slipped into some pajama bottoms and got into bed with Cassandra, turning his back on her before immediately falling asleep.

Cassandra opened her eyes to find an arm around her waist. For a moment she panicked until she realized it was just Harry. Lifting his

arm off her, she slid out of the bed and headed for the bathroom. When she returned to the bedroom, she found Harry awake. "I'm sorry; I didn't mean to wake you up."

"It's okay." Harry got up. "I'm going back to sleep once I've used the bathroom."

"Perhaps I should go back to the hospital." Cassandra looked longingly at the bed.

"Don't be daft. You've only been asleep for two hours. James will let us know if there's any change." Harry headed into the bathroom before coming back out to find Cassandra tucked up and already asleep again.

When Harry woke up several hours later, a lightly snoring Cassandra was curled up against him, her hand trapped between them and her face buried in his neck. Harry gently tried to pull free, only for Cassandra to grumble and snuggle even closer. "Too early."

Harry sucked in his breath as Cassandra's hand moved lower as she unconsciously sought to keep his warmth as close as possible. "Cassandra, wake up."

"Go 'way." Cassandra still wasn't properly awake, and once more strove to slip back into sleep.

"Cassandra." Harry persisted.

Cassandra opened one eye to find herself looking at skin before lifting her head up sharply, cracking it on Harry's chin. "Ow."

Harry rubbed his chin. "Good afternoon."

It was only then that Cassandra realized where her hand was, and she hurriedly pulled it back towards herself. "Oh Merlin. I'm sorry Harry."

Not wanting to discomfit her further, Harry ignored Cassandra's embarrassment. "Let me look at your head." Harry's chin was throbbing so he guessed Cassandra's head must be as well.

"You've got a hard jaw." Cassandra let Harry examine her head where she could already feel a lump forming.

"Werewolf." Harry reminded her. "Let me heal that and get you a pain potion."

Cassandra gave a sigh of relief as she took the potion that Harry had fished out of the bedside drawer. Not only did it help the pain in her head but it also relieved the soreness she could still feel in her shoulder. "Thanks."

In an effort to make Cassandra forget about her embarrassment, Harry couldn't resist teasing her. "You snore."

"I do not." Cassandra retorted in a slightly snotty voice.

"I can prove it." Harry continued to rib her. "I have a pensieve in the cupboard over there."

Cassandra promptly hit him with a pillow. "You are not a gentleman, Harry Sebastian."

Harry raised an eyebrow, and his good intentions about trying to make Cassandra forget about her embarrassment went out of the window. "Of course I am, Cassandra Black. That's why you've woken up with your virtue intact. Most men would have taken advantage of you when they woke up to find your face buried in their neck and a hand on their..."

"Harry!" Cassandra shrieked, her face burning. "You are so not a gentleman. If you were, you wouldn't have brought up where my hand was. And besides I didn't know."

Harry was hard pushed not to laugh at the indignant look on the girl's face. "Are you sure you didn't know?" Harry decided to tease her some more and hooked his arm around her waist tugging her so that

she ended up lying flat on her back under him as he looked down at her.

Not intimidated by Harry, Cassandra snorted in an unladylike fashion. "As I've already told you, Harry Sebastian, you're not that irresistible."

Harry lowered his voice so that it sounded seductive and almost hypnotic. "Are you so sure about that?"

Cassandra was a little taken aback as Harry's hand moved up to caress her cheek, but she still managed to refute his accusation. "Perfectly."

Harry lowered his head, hiding his grin as Cassandra's eyes widened as his mouth got closer to hers before dropping a kiss on her nose. "Good." Harry sat up. "I'm going to get dressed. You can make some tea. There should be some in the cupboard over the sink."

Taken by surprise at Harry's speedy transition from playful to matter-of-fact, Cassandra didn't move straightaway. In contrast to Harry, her thoughts were in turmoil as she realized that she'd actually wanted Harry to kiss her. Knowing that he wouldn't be much longer, she knew she couldn't remain in bed and, grabbing his robe from the end of the bed, she padded out of the bedroom and into the kitchen to make tea as he'd asked. By the time Harry sat down at the table with her, Cassandra had convinced herself that she'd imagined it, and was therefore able to converse quite normally with him.

Harry stretched. "Do you think we should give all the students the rest of the week off, not just tomorrow?"

"Sounds like a good idea." Cassandra grinned at him. "But I don't think Minerva and Uncle James would be too happy about it."

"I'm going to cheat when we return on Tuesday. The students can all tell me what their favorite spell is and why, before demonstrating it." Harry smiled happily. "That's the lesson plan. I can work on the rest of the week in class while you monitor the kids."

"That'll be fine." Cassandra was glad it wouldn't be anything she'd really have to work on. "I'd best go get dressed."

"I'll tell you what. Seeing as we didn't get to eat dinner last night, how about after checking in on Faith and your Dad, I take you out tonight instead?" Harry felt bad that Cassandra had missed out on the dinner he'd planned for her.

"That would be nice." Cassandra smiled tiredly. "Except for the fact that I don't think I'd be able to stay awake."

"So how about in a fortnight on our next weekend off?" Harry offered instead.

"Saturday?" Cassandra asked.

"Saturday will be perfect." Harry assured her.

Cassandra yawned. "Actually instead of getting dressed, do you mind if I go back to bed?"

"Help yourself." Harry offered. "I'll wake you in a few hours and we can get something quick to eat before going to see your Dad this evening."

The Next Morning

It had ended up being a rough night for both Harry and Cassandra, as Cassandra had woken Harry up screaming in her sleep. After Harry had woken her from her nightmare, she'd ended up in his arms crying herself back to sleep.

When Harry woke as daylight started to creep into the room, it was to find Cassandra snuggled up to him yet again. "And she says I'm not irresistible."

Still half asleep, Cassandra murmured something Harry didn't catch. "Don't you want to get up?"

"No." Cassandra mumbled as she buried her face even further into Harry's neck and within moments she was sound asleep again.

After the night's events, Harry hadn't got the heart to wake her and he left her where she was, his arm around her back as he thought about the trauma the poor girl had gone through. When they'd gone to see Sirius the previous evening, they'd found that he still hadn't regained consciousness as Craig was keeping him sedated. Faith, however, had been moved into Sirius' room where, after she'd seen Sirius, had fallen asleep with minutes as her body continued its recovery from the ordeal of giving birth and the loss of her strength. At the end of the visit, Remus had offered to take Cassandra back with him to be with Orion and Katherine, but the girl had refused opting instead to return to Harry's apartment.

As Cassandra started snoring again, Harry closed his eyes and he too fell back to sleep. When he woke up, he discovered that Cassandra had already showered, dressed and was sitting in the kitchen drinking tea. "Good morning."

Cassandra smiled brightly at him and held out a piece of parchment. "Uncle Craig sent this. Dad is awake."

"We'll go see him once I've had a cup of tea." Harry poured his tea out and took several large mouthfuls before sighing in bliss. "And then sadly I think we'd better get back to school."

Cassandra glanced at Harry over her mug. "Thanks for being here for me. I know Uncle Remus wanted me to go back with him but it's been easier to deal with having your support, especially after what I've done. And as corny as it sounds, I really think of you as being my best friend now."

"And as equally corny as it sounds, I feel the same way about you." Harry knew that it was true. Somehow Cassandra had managed to slip into the role that, after Mione's death, Severus had once filled for him. "So now we've ascertained that we're best friends, why don't I take my newly discovered best friend to visit her Dad?"

"I'd like that." Cassandra took her teacup over to the sink and rinsed it before leaving it on the side to dry.

Harry used magic to deal with his own mug before getting up and wrapping his arm around Cassandra. "Ready?"

Cassandra leant into Harry. "Ready."

The Watchers' Council

Mione porkeyed into the office to find Remus already behind his desk. "How was your weekend?"

"It could have been better." Remus yawned. "I spent most of it at St Mungo's."

Mione was immediately concerned. "Did something happen to Rupert?"

Remus realized that Mione appeared to have no idea what had gone on at the Ministry. "Didn't you see a newspaper?"

"I tried to shut out the world to concentrate on the twins." Mione admitted. "I felt guilty after not seeing them that much of them during last week."

Remus briefly explained what had happened at the Ministry. "Sirius is going to make a full recovery but he'll be out of action for about a fortnight. I can't even tell you how emotional it was when he saw Faith and the baby. I don't think there was a dry eye in the room, and that included Alastor Moody who'd picked that moment to drop by."

"I can't believe Faith is alright." Mione wiped her eyes as she'd also started to cry when she found out that her friend had survived the birth. "I must send her something for the baby."

"I'm not really in the mood for work." Remus stood up. "Do you want to go shopping instead?"

Mione did. "Let me ask Melanie to cancel my meetings." She then let Remus apparate her into London where he led the way to his favorite store.

Mione was surprised to find that it was a Muggle store he led her into. "I thought you'd have gone to a magical store."

"They have some of the best things money can buy here." Remus liked wandering around the large department store watching the Muggles who had no idea of what was going on around them.

Mione picked up a romper suit. "It's so adorable."

"I told you." Remus laughed at the delighted look on Mione's face. "Don't tell me. The twins' clothes and playthings are all custom made."

"They are." Mione admitted. "Thomas said he wants the best for them."

Remus spotted a slightly despondent tone in Mione's voice as she mentioned her husband. "What's wrong?"

"I'll come back here later." Mione put down the outfit. "Can we go somewhere and talk?"

Remus led the way to the cafeteria where Mione told him about her conversation with Thomas and his admitting to hurting Draco. "So he did do it?"

Mione nodded. "I thought I knew him but now I'm not so sure."

"Does he know how upset you are about it?" Remus could see that Mione was actually trembling.

"Yes." Mione thought back to Friday night. "But he also said it's who he is and he doesn't regret doing it. I couldn't stay in the bedroom with him and ended up sleeping in my own room. When I got up on Saturday morning, he'd gone."

"Gone where?" Remus placed a hand over Mione's trembling one.

"To a meeting that he had to attend in London. Not wanting to leave things like that for another night, I portkeyed to Grimmauld Square on Saturday evening. Thomas wasn't there when I arrived but when he got back he was in a terrible mood, and went straight to his study." Mione had again spent the night in her own room as Thomas had still been in his study at midnight when she'd checked. "I didn't see him on Sunday at all as he left early and didn't arrive back until just before I left this morning, so we still haven't had time to talk." Mione used a napkin to wipe her eyes as she felt tears threatening. "I don't know what to do."

"Mione, you've got to look at it from Thomas' point of view." Remus wished he'd never mentioned it. "He felt that he was defending your honor. Yes, he may have overstepped the mark, but I don't think he did so without good reason."

"I know that, but still..." Mione's voice trailed off.

Remus approached the problem from a different angle. "Mione, do you blame H.J. for what he did to Wormtail and the Sirius you knew?"

"Of course not." The words flew out of Mione's mouth before she even thought about what she was saying.

"Then you shouldn't blame Thomas for what he did." Remus smiled as realization of the point he was trying to make dawned on Mione's face. "I have to be candid. I'd probably have done far worse to Draco if it had been my wife he'd slapped. It was actually a good job I didn't know about what he'd done to you and Hermione until after it happened, otherwise I'd have been the one to do that to Draco, and not Thomas."

Mione was a little shocked at Remus' statement but understood what he was trying to say to her. "I overreacted, didn't I? Thomas didn't do anything nearly as drastic as H.J. but I still judged him as if he did. I should have stayed and talked."

Remus was pleased to see the despairing look had left Mione's face. "Look, why don't you go home? Take tomorrow off. I owe you a couple of days off for all the hard work you put in last week."

"Not yet." Mione gave Remus a tremulous smile. "I still want to buy something for the baby."

After spending an inordinate amount of money, Mione followed Remus out of the store. "I'll see you on Wednesday, and thanks." Mione kissed Remus' cheek before slipping into the alleyway and disappearing.

At the sound of a timid tap on his study door, Thomas glanced up and put down the envelope he'd just been about to open. "Come in."

Mione looked round the door. "Hi."

"What are you doing here?" An unsmiling Thomas stared at Mione.

"I thought I'd surprise you." Mione suddenly felt hesitant at the reception she was receiving.

"You certainly did that." Thomas locked the letter in his desk before getting up. "Is everything alright at work?"

A little diffidently, Mione explained what had happened at the Ministry, and with Faith. "Neither Remus nor I felt like working so we went shopping for something for the baby. We also talked about Draco Malfoy and what you'd done to him."

Thomas frowned. "I'm not entirely sure I'm happy about everyone knowing what's going on in our private life."

Mione frowned as well. "Remus is not a gossip, and he's not only my boss, but my best friend as well."

Thomas crossed his arms and leant back against the desk. "So what did your best friend and boss have to say about Draco?"

At Thomas' sarcastic tone, Mione didn't bother answering and walked back out of the room. She didn't get far as Thomas apparated directly into her path. "I'm sorry."

Mione paused. "For what?"

"For being so abrupt with you." Thomas sighed. "I hated it that you slept alone all weekend. Why didn't you come and talk to me Saturday night? I know you were here at the London house. When she arrived this morning, the children's nanny said you'd left them to come here."

"Because you were in a terrible mood." Mione disclosed why she hadn't gone near Thomas at all. "I'd been about to come and see you when I heard raised voices and you swearing at someone, before your study door shut. Did you have a bad time at your meeting?"

"Yes. It didn't go to plan because I underestimated my opposition and screwed up, as did some of my associates." Thomas explained. "But we thrashed it out on Saturday night which was the raised voices you heard."

"Can I help at all?" Mione didn't know what the meeting had been about as she rarely interfered in Thomas' business affairs, and he showed the same respect by keeping out of hers.

"Not this time." Thomas let out a long breath. "I've made alternative plans which should work out in the end, and I'll be able to get what I need."

"As long as you get there in the end." Mione was glad that they were finally talking.

"I'm sure I will." Thomas reassured his wife. "So please tell me, what did Remus say to you about Draco?"

"Basically that he'd have done the same thing if it had been his wife who'd been attacked, and that I shouldn't have judged you so harshly." Mione paraphrased what Remus had said, omitting the

actual example of H.J. that Remus had given. "He's also given me a few days off."

Thomas put his arms around Mione's waist. "So I've got you to myself for a few days?"

"If you want me." Mione looked up into Thomas' now smiling face.

"I want you." Thomas kissed Mione as he apparated them both to his room.

Next Chapter: Sirius receives an unexpected overture; We learn a little more about Lily Snape; Cassandra takes a game a little too far.

Chapter 24: Overture

2nd December 2003

Harry sat down in Sirius' study. "You look much better than the last time I saw you."

"A slit throat tends to make a man look less than at his best." Sirius retorted, his voice sounding gravelly since, as Craig had suspected, the attack had caused some damage to his vocal cords. "So what have you to report?"

Harry had a request to make before starting. "Before I tell you, I have a huge favor to ask of you."

"What is it?" Sirius was feeling pretty amenable.

"I want to show the group the attack." Harry knew that Sirius would understand who he meant by the group.

"You do know that it will mean revealing your status to more people than I'd like." Sirius wasn't sure he was going to allow Harry's request.

"I can use a localized Fidelius." Harry offered.

Sirius debated the request for a few minutes before finally agreeing to it. "The viewing will have to take place somewhere secure."

"The Chamber at Hogwarts will fit the bill." Harry knew that as it was under the Fidelius charm, it would be perfectly safe.

"That sounds ideal." Sirius agreed with Harry's determination.

"I'll arrange it for this Sunday." Harry informed him. "Do you want to attend as well?"

"I do, and just so you know, I'll be bringing Faith with me." Sirius hadn't told his wife about Harry and his past before as she'd been

pregnant, but he didn't want her outside the loop now that she'd recovered. "So shall we say noon?"

"Noon it is." Harry then returned to Sirius' original request. "In relation to the attack, I'm coming up with nothing. I've checked out every wardbreaker we have on record, and everyone comes up clean." Harry had been frustrated at not getting anywhere. "That includes Bill Weasley who has a watertight alibi."

"Dammit." Sirius knew that Harry had been almost sure that it had been the Gringotts wardbreaker. Even though all the Death Eaters had had their magical signatures and scents masked, there had been something about the way the Death Eater had carried himself that had made Harry suspect it was Bill. "Where was he?"

"In a meeting with Thomas Seville and your brother." Harry informed Sirius. "While Mione was able to confirm that some sort of meeting had taken place she had no idea who had attended. However, after Thomas ordered them to, Gringotts verified somewhat reluctantly that Bill had been requested to attend a meeting with Thomas and Regulus, so I'm guessing my hunch was wrong."

"I wonder what Regulus was doing with them." Sirius rubbed his chin in thought, revealing the scar that now adorned his neck as Craig had been unable to remove it due to the magical nature of the spell.

"They've been friends for a while. If you remember, Regulus even attended Thomas' wedding." Harry had never found out how the two men had met. "Anyway, it turns out that they were both discussing upgrading the warding on their properties; Thomas because of the children, and Regulus because he said that the wards on the Black Estate were starting to fail. Gringotts supplied a report of the meeting which showed all the changes that Bill recommended."

Sirius scowled at the news about Regulus. "I told Regulus when I let him take over the Black Estate that I'd deal with it if that ever happened."

“He did mention that when I questioned him, and said to tell you that he was hardly going to bother you at a time like this.” Harry dug into his pocket. “He also asked me to give you this. I’ve checked it for curses.”

“Don’t you trust my brother?” Sirius smirked a little as he took the parcel and envelope.

“Not particularly.” Harry owned. “Do you?”

“No.” Sirius answered truthfully as he told Harry why. “When Voldemort first began his rise to power almost twenty years ago, I accused Regulus of being part of it; something I’m still half-convinced was true but it’s also something he denied.”

“Did you bring him in and question him officially?” Harry enquired.

Sirius shook his head. “I was still quite far down the ranks at that time, and my superior disagreed with my hunch. So instead of listening to him, I went ahead and accused Regulus pointblank.”

Harry wasn’t surprised that Sirius had done so. “Is that why the two of you don’t speak?”

“Yes.” Sirius admitted. “Not surprisingly Regulus was furious at my accusation and broke off all communication. I tried to apologize but he wanted nothing to do with me. Since then, the only time we’ve really been in touch was via two short notes and at family funerals. The notes were sent by Petra; firstly to congratulate my wife and I on the birth of Cassandra, and then again when Eleanor died to commiserate on her death, and congratulate me on the birth of Orion. I sent similar missives when their children were born.”

“So this probably has something to do with little Sirius’ birth doesn’t it?” Harry indicated the parcel and envelope that sat in Sirius’ hand.

“We’ll see.” Sirius ripped open the envelope and read the parchment contained within before passing it to Harry.

Harry read the letter.

‘Sirius

I hope this communication finds you recovered. Firstly, I would like to offer my congratulations on the birth of your son.

My main purpose, however, for contacting you is to seek forgiveness from you for my foolhardy refusal to accept your repeated apologies, and for my behavior after Grandfather Arcturus’ death.

When I heard about the attack and what had happened to you, I was upset and horrified. It was then that I realized that I care too much about you to let our estrangement continue without at least offering to try and set things right between us.

As a step in the right direction, I’d like you to accept the accompanying gift to celebrate your son’s birth.

Your brother

Regulus’

Harry whistled. “That’s quite a letter.”

“Tell me about it.” Sirius unwrapped the accompanying gift, revealing a deep blue velvet box bearing the Black family crest. “It can’t be.”

Harry watched as Sirius unsnapped the fastener that kept the box closed. “What is it?”

Sirius felt his eyes fill with tears as he looked inside the box. “My Grandfather used to own this. I was always close to him and even though it’s not terribly valuable, this award meant more to me than I can say, as Grandfather Arcturus was the one who encouraged me to follow my dream and become an Auror as he had been.”

“What was it for?” Harry could see that it was a First Class Order.

“Grandfather used to joke that it was awarded for giving the Ministry a lot of gold.” Sirius reminisced. “But in actuality I found out it was for saving a family when fire broke out in their home and they were overcome by smoke. Grandfather apparated in time and time again to get them out.”

“So how did it get into Regulus’ hands?” Harry wondered if Grandfather Arcturus had left the medal to Regulus after all.

“When he died, as our Grandmother had already passed on, Grandfather Arcturus left all of his personal belongings that weren’t tied to the Black Estate to Regulus and I in equal shares.” Sirius explained. “But when it came to dividing everything up, Regulus had first choice as he was the youngest and our Father’s favorite, and Grandfather Arcturus had made Father the executor of his will.”

Harry understood. “Regulus chose the Medal didn’t he?”

“I offered him everything else that Grandfather had left in return for it but he refused pointblank.” Sirius took the box back from Harry. “I begged and pleaded with him but Regulus still refused.”

“I take it this happened after the two of you had become estranged.” Harry surmised.

“About three months afterwards. Father also died shortly after that, which was when I made the offer of the Black Estate to Regulus.” Sirius had hoped his offer would soften things between them but it hadn’t. “So as much as I’m grateful to receive this, I can’t help but question his motives.”

“What are you going to do?” Harry questioned.

“Contact him.” Sirius wanted to find out why Regulus had finally made a conciliatory gesture. “I’ll let you know how it turns out.”

“Cassandra’s staying with you on Friday, isn’t she?” Harry could see that Sirius was a little thrown by Harry’s comment.

“Yes but what has that got to do with Regulus?” Sirius queried.

“I’m taking to Cassandra out to dinner on Saturday to make up for the dinner we missed when you were attacked.” Harry explained. “I can drop by a couple of hours earlier than I’d planned and report in then if you’d like.”

“I’ll get in touch with Regulus and see what he wants.” Sirius closed the box. “In the meantime, let me know if you find anything out.”

“I will.” Harry checked the time. “I’d best get back to Hogwarts. Cassandra is covering detention for me tonight and I feel bad about it, particularly as she’s still getting over what happened last week, and this is the fourth time now, as I’ve been trying to follow up on various leads. I’ll be glad when Craig gives Bella a clean bill of health.”

“I think Craig is deliberately drawing it out.” Sirius knew that his friend had been upset that Bella had been hurt yet again. He then changed the subject. “Did Cassandra tell you that she’s withdrawn her application for next year?”

Harry nodded. “Cassandra said that after what happened she knows she’s not cut out for the job.”

“I can’t say I’m too upset about it.” Sirius had been both relieved and saddened by Cassandra’s official withdrawal letter but he fully supported his daughter’s decision. “But she’s right. If she thinks she can’t cope, then she shouldn’t be applying to become an Auror.”

“I’m hoping James will consider letting her take over my position when I leave.” Harry knew that Cassandra was very young but she was coping well with everything that Harry had so far given her.

“I’m hoping so too.” Sirius wanted Harry on his team full-time as he suspected that Bella would eventually leave if Craig got his way about having children. He’d already decided that even though he knew he’d get some flack for his choice, based on the limited experience he’d

had with Harry and Harry's former position, that he was going to offer Bella's position to Harry if she did leave.

"I really do have to go." Harry shook Sirius' hand. "I'll be in touch if I find anything out."

5th December 2003

Sirius sat nervously in his study and waited for his brother's arrival. Faith had taken little Sirius out to Mione's so that they could be alone. A crack from the hallway signaled Regulus' arrival, and Sirius headed out to meet him. "Regulus."

"Sirius." Regulus could see where Thomas had caught Sirius with the luguolo spell and he winced at the scar.

Sirius knew that Regulus could see his scar. "It's always going to be there."

"I'm sorry." Regulus was surprised to find that he meant his words. "It feels strange being back here."

"No stranger than seeing you here." Sirius held out a hand. "Shall we go into my study?"

Regulus followed his brother into the study. "This hasn't changed since it was Father's."

"I've thought about remodeling it but I've never gotten around to it." Sirius walked over to the drinks cabinet. "Do you want something to drink?"

"A whiskey if you have it." Regulus sat down and waited for Sirius to come over with the drink. "Thank you."

Sirius took the scotch he'd poured himself, and sat on the edge of his desk in front of Regulus, rather than behind it as he normally would. "May I be blunt?"

Regulus had expected Sirius to be suspicious of his motives. "Go ahead. I'm not going to storm out."

"Why now?" Sirius wanted to believe Regulus meant well but his overriding instincts were telling him differently.

"Because I almost lost you." Regulus sighed. "I know it's been a long time, Sirius, but I'd really like to let bygones be bygones."

"I don't know." Sirius was honest with Regulus. "So much has happened in our lives. I'm not sure if we can really pick up where we left off."

Regulus put down his whiskey and stood up. "You were once my hero, and I wanted nothing more than to win your approval for everything I did. I know it's never going to be like that again but Sirius, I almost lost you last week. I'm just sorry that it took that to make me realize how much you still mean to me. All I'm asking for is one chance."

Aware that it had been his accusation that had begun the estrangement, Sirius decided that he couldn't refuse Regulus but he still needed to make sure of one thing first. "Please don't read anything into this but I need to see the nape of your neck, and your left arm."

Regulus acted confused. "Why?"

"I can't tell you." Sirius waited for Regulus to allow him to look or for him to walk out.

"Go ahead." Regulus unrolled his left sleeve before lowering his head.

Sirius checked for masking spells before checking Regulus' nape. He let out a sigh of relief as he found it completely clear of the Dark Mark. "I'm sorry I had to ask you to do that."

“So now you’ve totally confused me, are you willing to give me a chance?” Regulus asked as he rolled his sleeve back down.

Sirius held out his hand to his brother. “I’m sorry for accusing you of being in league with Voldemort.”

“And I’m sorry for taking the one thing I knew had meaning for you that belonged to Grandfather Arcturus.” Regulus ignored Sirius’ hand and pulled his brother into a hug.

Sirius was shocked to find that Regulus was actually shaking, and he tightened his hold around his brother. Neither of them said anything as they just stood there and held each other. Eventually Regulus pulled back, and sat down before taking a large mouthful of whiskey. “So do you still have the billiards room?”

“Do you fancy a game?” Sirius picked up his scotch.

Regulus followed his brother out of the study.

Later that evening

Thomas sat across from Regulus as they ate dinner. “So, how did it go with Sirius?”

“He accepted my apology.” Regulus put down his fork, and turned the focus on Thomas. “Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?”

Thomas also put down his fork. “If it’s not too personal, then no.”

Regulus hoped Thomas wouldn’t consider it that way. “How do you feel about the Sevilles?”

Thomas knew then what was bothering Regulus. “You felt something when you went to see Sirius, didn’t you?”

Regulus nodded his head. “I thought I hated Sirius but I don’t. We spent this afternoon together playing billiards and just simply talking

things through. I didn't realize how much I've actually missed my brother."

Thomas decided to be honest with Regulus. "Okay. I'll answer your question. I always dreamt of having parents when I grew up in the orphanage. When I took over Thomas Seville's body, I didn't expect to feel anything for his family. However, after a few months I found that I'd grown to care for them. I know they didn't know who I really was but the love they showed me was something I've grown used to."

"Could you hurt them if you had to?" Regulus hoped that Thomas would continue to be honest.

Thomas shook his head. "No, I don't believe I could. You feel the same way about Sirius don't you?"

Regulus nodded. "When you were torturing him, I kept telling myself I didn't care and that he deserved it. Now, however, I don't think that I could stand by and let you do that again."

"Even if it meant dying yourself?" Thomas questioned Regulus' restored brotherly affection for Sirius.

"I don't know until I'm in that position." Regulus answered truthfully.

"I can't promise that I'm not going to hurt Sirius again but I will refrain from doing so unless I can't find another way." Thomas wasn't going to offer more than that to his friend.

"Thank you." Regulus was aware that this was all he was going to get. "So where's Mione tonight?"

"Cleveland. She left after spending the afternoon with Faith." Thomas hated it when his wife spent time away. "But she'll be home by Friday. Where's your wife?"

"At home entertaining Severus Snape I do believe." Regulus had known for some time that Petra was cheating with the potions master

as she'd not hesitated to tell him. "I just hope that Lily never finds out."

"I'm not sure I'd want to tangle with her if I was Petra." Thomas observed. "She's totally different from the Lily I knew."

"She's also quite the consummate actress." Regulus acknowledged. "Anyone watching Lily would think that she's completely deferential to Severus but I know from Petra that it's just a front. Even though Lily behaves like a good pureblood's wife should in public, it's quite opposite in private."

"Do you think she loves Severus or do you think it's just of convenience for them both?" Thomas knew only love would have enticed him into marriage.

"It's definitely a love match." Regulus knew that Lily loved the potionsmaster. "To quote my wife 'Lily loves Severus as much as she hates Potter and believe me Lily hates Potter with a vengeance'."

"So do you know why Lily divorced Potter?" Thomas picked up his wine as he asked.

"The rumor is that he was seeing someone else." Regulus hadn't believed it at the time. "But I think it was something else. While Potter might have been an ass at school when it came to pranks, he was always a bit straitlaced when it came to women. I think Lily was already seeing Severus before they divorced, but being a gentleman, Potter let himself take the blame. It was a well-known fact that Severus had been in love with her since fifth year; I doubt he'd have turned her away even if she was initially married."

"If that's the case, then why is Severus in bed with your wife?" Thomas, while giving the impression of being above listening to gossip, was always interested to know what was going on.

Something Regulus was well aware of. "Because according to Petra, Lily is a bit of a harridan, and Severus was tired of listening to her complaining, particularly in the bedroom. I don't doubt he loves Lily,

but I think he just wants sex without the complications. And besides, Petra listens to him; Lily doesn't."

"I have to be honest." Thomas thought back to the first meeting he'd held when Lily had challenged him. "I was taken aback when Lily took off her mask. The Lily I knew despised me, and would never have consented to become a Death Eater. This Lily seems to revel in it. She was quite vicious in Azkaban when she helped to kill Cammie's parents. Do you think Severus is aware of her true nature?"

"I don't know." Petra had never mentioned anything about it to Regulus. "I'd say probably not, as Petra is totally unaware of what I do, and, like me, I'm sure Lily has some viable excuse for her own absences. I think Petra believes I'm seeing Virginie when I'm not there."

Thomas had been astounded to find out how the various people he'd known had ended up connected in this world. "Would you marry her if Petra was out of the way?"

"Yes." Regulus had no hesitation in answering. "But I'm not so sure she'd marry me. Virginie likes the arrangement we have. As both of her brothers were killed were some years ago, she is the heiress to her father's estate and she doesn't feel the need to be married. She's already named our son her heir, so I'm fairly content to let things lie. The laws in France are different for purebloods so it doesn't matter that Jean-Luc was born outside of marriage."

"Does Petra know about your liaison?" Thomas had never had quite such an in-depth personal conversation with Regulus before.

"She knows about Virginie but I've never told her about Jean-Luc or Francine but I know that she must suspect they're mine." Regulus shrugged. "Neither of us wished to marry the other but she provided me with the requisite heir and my daughter, and I'm grateful to her for that. But I've never felt love for her, and I doubt very much I ever will."

"What would happen if she became pregnant with Snape's child?" Thomas brought up the obvious thing that could happen.

“I wouldn’t be willing to put with another man’s child in those circumstances.” Regulus knew it was hypocritical but he didn’t care. “So I’d be finding out what it’s like to be a widower, and Severus would be finding out what it’s like inside Azkaban.”

Thomas smirked. “I do like your idea of poetic justice.”

Regulus finished his glass of wine. “Thanks but I don’t see it ever coming to fruition as Petra has told me that both she and Severus are extraordinarily careful when it comes down to the contraceptive charms they use.”

Thomas stood up. “Well should you ever require assistance in dealing with a problem of that nature, or if you should decide that your wife has become a hindrance, I’m always happy to offer my help.”

Regulus found it more than a little disturbing to be discussing his wife’s potential murder with his friend, who he’d found that, despite his very urbane outward appearance, could be completely ruthless. “Thank you, but I’m going to decline. Petra may be many things, but she’s a good mother to our children, and the instance I’ve described is the only thing that would incite me to dispose of her.”

Thomas knew that he was making Regulus uncomfortable and dropped the subject. “Would you like to stay tonight?”

“You want a game of chess?” Regulus had played Thomas several times and had lost every time.

“I’m in the mood for a victory, so why not.” Thomas grinned before leading the way out of the dining room.

6th December 2003

Cassandra followed Harry into his rooms as they got back from dinner. “Open the champagne you bought me for my birthday. I left it in your wine rack. I think Dad’s clean bill of health requires a toast. And we can try some of the chocolates I’ve put off opening until now.”

“They’re supposed to be for you.” Harry argued as he pulled the champagne out, and tapped it on the side to chill it.

“I want you to at least try some since you bought them.” Cassandra wandered into the kitchenette and took the box out of the cupboard where she’d left it. “Did I tell you that La Maison du Chocolat is my favorite chocolate shop?”

“I think you might have mentioned it once or twice.” Harry popped the cork. “Champagne flutes please.”

Cassandra opened the cupboard again, and pulled two out. “I had a really nice time today. It was really good of you to come over and see Dad for a few hours before we went to dinner.”

“I had to report in to him, so it wasn’t exactly out of my way.” Harry reminded Cassandra as he poured out the champagne. “Let’s sit down.”

Cassandra took a sip of the champagne. “This is also my favorite champagne.”

“Which is why we were drinking it with dinner.” Harry sat down and reached into his pocket. “This is for you.”

Cassandra looked quizzically at Harry. “What’s this for?”

“I wanted to get you a little something to cheer yourself up.” Harry watched a little anxiously as Cassandra unwrapped the small box. “And to say thank you for covering for me for the last couple of weeks while I tried to sort things out at the Ministry.”

Cassandra lifted the lid and gave a shocked gasp. “Harry. You shouldn’t have. These were the earrings I wanted for Mione’s wedding that Dad said were too expensive. I can’t accept them.”

Harry went to reach out to grab the box. “If you don’t want them...”

Cassandra pulled the box back towards her. "No I do. It's just that..." Cassandra stopped making excuses. "Harry, they're beautiful. Thank you."

"You're more than welcome." Harry could see that Cassandra was truly pleased by the gift.

Cassandra pulled out the gold hoops she was wearing and slipped in the pink diamond studs instead. "So what do you think?"

"They look lovely on you." Harry complimented her.

Cassandra leant over and placed a soft kiss at the corner of Harry's mouth. "Thank you."

Harry could taste the chocolate she'd just eaten. "Champagne truffle?"

"How do you do that?" Cassandra took a mouthful of her wine.

"Acute senses. The closer to a full moon or just after one it is, then the more sensitive they are." Harry explained. "And with a full moon in a couple of nights, my senses are particularly keen right now."

Cassandra gave a cheeky grin. "Hold on." She scanned the chocolates in the box before slipping one into her mouth. After swallowing it, she kissed Harry on the cheek. "Let's see how good you really are."

Harry lifted his finger and swiped it across his cheek before slipping it into his mouth. "Cherry Liqueur."

"Damn." Cassandra had hoped the alcohol would confuse him. "You'll never get this one."

Harry took a mouthful of his champagne as he waited. "You know you're going to lose don't you?"

“Am not.” Cassandra swallowed the chocolate and kissed Harry on the forehead. “So tell me, what is it?”

Harry used his finger and tasted it. “Peaches?”

“Not exactly.” Cassandra grinned delightedly and kissed his cheek, letting her mouth linger a little longer than before. “Try again.”

Again Harry used his finger. “Peach schnapps?”

“No.” Cassandra went to take a mouthful of champagne, only for Harry to stop her.

“That’s cheating.” Harry put down the champagne. “One more try?”

Thinking she’d won, Cassandra glowered at Harry. “If you don’t get it this time though, then I’ve won.”

“Fair enough.” Harry waited patiently for Cassandra to decide where she was going to kiss him.

Cassandra picked up Harry’s hand and kissed his thumb. “Last go.”

“It’s peaches and cream, isn’t it?” Harry asked after sucking on his thumb.

“I was so sure you wouldn’t get it.” Cassandra pouted as she picked up her champagne.

Harry grinned. “I think it’s my turn now.”

Cassandra handed over the box. “I haven’t got your senses though.”

“Which is why I’m going to make it easier for you.” Harry chose a chocolate and ate it slowly. “Close your eyes.”

Cassandra put down her champagne flute before doing as Harry asked. “Why do I have my eyes closed?”

“So you can concentrate.” Harry leant forward and lightly kissed Cassandra on the nose. “Tell me.”

Cassandra kept her eyes closed and swiped her finger over her nose before sliding it into her mouth. “Strawberry.”

“See, you’re quite good at this.” Harry complimented her. “I think you can open your eyes now.”

“One more.” Cassandra was enjoying the game, and kept her eyes closed.

Harry chose one more chocolate and ate it. “This one is harder.”

“I’m still going to get it.” Cassandra was determined.

Harry took Cassandra’s hand and kissed her on the back of her knuckles, letting his mouth linger slightly. “Off you go.”

Cassandra licked the back of her hand. “Nougat.”

“Right again.” Harry picked up his champagne.

“How about a tie-breaker?” Cassandra picked up a chocolate without looking. “Open wide.”

Harry tensed as Cassandra slid the chocolate into his mouth, her fingers brushing against his lips. “Last one then.”

Cassandra watched Harry chew the chocolate. “I’m ready.”

Harry picked up her other hand and kissed the center of Cassandra’s palm this time. “What is it?”

Suppressing the shiver that had run through her at the touch of Harry’s mouth on her skin, Cassandra drew her tongue over her palm before frowning. “I don’t know.”

“Do you give in?” Harry asked.

“No.” Cassandra was determined to beat Harry. “I gave you several chances.”

Harry leant forward and kissed the corner of Cassandra’s mouth. “Try now.”

Cassandra’s tongue darted out. “It’s some kind of liqueur, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” Harry was amused as he watched Cassandra try to figure it out.

“I want one more guess.” Cassandra leant forward and brushed her lips across Harry’s, letting her tongue steal out and run across his bottom lip.

Harry frowned and pulled back. “I think we’re getting beyond a game now, Cassandra.”

Cassandra knew she’d taken it too far. “I’m sorry, Harry. I’ve embarrassed you. I think I’d better go.”

Harry could hear the tears in Cassandra’s voice as she got to her feet, so he snaked his hand out and grabbed her arm, pulling her back down to sit next to him. “Cassandra, you haven’t embarrassed me.”

Cassandra lifted her head and tried to smile at Harry. “I feel like such an idiot.”

“Why?” Harry asked softly.

“Because I read something that wasn’t there.” Cassandra gave a shaky laugh. “See, now I’ve embarrassed you even more.”

She tried to pull free from Harry, who wouldn’t let her go. “Cassandra, you aren’t reading something that isn’t there. I am attracted to you; it would be hard not to be.”

Cassandra didn't believe him. "You don't have to try and make me feel better, Harry."

Instead of arguing with her, Harry moved his hand to the back of Cassandra's neck before covering her mouth with his. As Harry gently begged entrance with his tongue, Cassandra stiffened for a moment before relaxing and let him in. As his tongue touched hers, she suddenly realized she knew what the chocolate was, and she pulled back before blurting out. "It's plum liqueur."

"It is." Harry could hear how unsteady his own voice sounded. "Cass, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that."

Cassandra let out a deep breath as she steadied herself. "Harry, it's okay. I shouldn't have kissed you first. I think I've had a little too much to drink so I'm going to head off to bed."

Harry walked Cassandra to the door that led to the office. "I'm having breakfast in my room if you want to join me at eight."

"If I'm up." With that Cassandra fled.

The Next Day

Harry checked the time. It was almost eight-fifteen and he had a sneaking suspicion that Cassandra was deliberately avoiding him. He was about to start his delayed breakfast when a light tap sounded on the adjoining door and Cassandra appeared. Before he could say anything, she apologized. "Harry, I'm so sorry about last night. I don't know what came over me."

Harry got up and tugged her over to him so that he could hug her. "So am I."

Cassandra felt like crying as she'd been up most of the night worrying. "So we're still best friends?"

Harry could hear the tears in her voice and kissed her on the top of her head. "Always."

Cassandra gave Harry a tight squeeze before stepping backwards. "So what's for breakfast?"

Harry listed what he'd got, and the two were soon talking as if the kiss had never happened. After spending the morning reviewing their work plan for the following week, Harry checked the time. "It's time to go."

When Harry and Cassandra arrived inside the Chamber, everyone else was waiting, including Mione. Cassandra rushed over. "Mione, I didn't expect to see you here."

"Harry said it was important." Mione went a little red. "I told Thomas I was having lunch with you."

"You will be." Harry assured her. "So you aren't lying, you're just not being entirely truthful."

Mione grinned at Harry. "Thanks for confirming my alibi."

"You're welcome." Harry placed his pensieve on the table. "So is everyone ready?"

Everyone nodded. Harry cast the localized Fidelius charm before depositing his own memory of the attack in the pensieve, with Sirius following suit before addressing Faith. "I'm not sure you want to see this."

"I've probably done worse." Faith wanted to see what had happened to Sirius.

The group assembled around the pensieve before plunging in, and the memory began. Cassandra almost immediately slipped her hand into Harry's as nerves began to assail her as she watched her Dad try and take on the Death Eaters alone before Dominus appeared and stunned him.

When it came to the point where Dominus was torturing Sirius, Faith's face was lined with fury as she watched Dominus strike her husband

again and again. "I'm going to kill that bastard if I ever get my hands on him."

Orion didn't doubt it. "I think you'll be getting in line."

Sirius stopped the memory and turned to his wife and son. "I don't want with either of you attempting anything should you ever come across him. He's dangerous. Orion, you should know this from Harry's memories better than Faith does."

"I want to see those memories." Faith turned on Harry.

"You can watch some of them after we've finished." Harry promised. "Let's continue the memory."

Cassandra had to look away when Dominus used the Cruciatus curse, and Harry pulled his hand free to put his arm around her shoulders, before whispering quietly to her. "Are you alright?"

Cassandra nodded and leant into the comfort Harry was offering. "But I'm scared everyone will hate me when they see what I did."

"No they won't." Harry watched as Bella and her men flooded into the room, soon being forced back out as Dominus himself began to pick them off one by one.

Harry felt Cassandra wince as Bella was sent flying backwards by a blasting curse. "She was wearing her basilisk armor this time and I think it's a good job she was." Harry then began his own memory as Sirius' ended.

Within moments Mione halted the memory. "You're an Unspeakable?"

"He is." Sirius informed her. "But you're not going to be able to tell anyone except each other because of the Fidelius. I'm not entirely happy that Harry has shown you this but we need every bit of help we can get. So if you feel the need to discuss it, please ensure that you can't be overheard, or better yet, don't mention it at all."

Everyone agreed not to mention it at all unless they were completely sure that they couldn't be overheard. Sirius then restarted the memory. At the point where Harry blasted him out of the way, Sirius grimaced. "You couldn't have thought of something else?"

"Not at the time. I pretty much had my hands full with Dominus and his sidekick." Harry pointed out.

When the time came for Sirius to push Bella out of the way, Harry halted the memory. "This is frankly quite disturbing, so for anyone without a strong stomach, I suggest you either look away or leave."

Luna spoke up. "I'm not keen on seeing it but if everyone else is staying then so am I."

Xander put his arm around his girlfriend. "I can't say that I rate blood and gore as one of my favorite things either but we're all here to try and learn something if we can so I'm going to watch it."

"Very well." Harry tightened his grip on Cassandra. "Are you ready?"

Cassandra nodded. "Go ahead."

Sirius noticed how deferential Harry was being to his daughter, and wondered if there was more going on between them than he believed. "Before he does, I just want everyone to remember that it's just a memory."

As Sirius finished speaking, Harry restarted the memory. Cassandra clung even tighter to him as she once again watched her Dad come close to dying. As she cast the killing curse, she was astounded at the amount of anger and hatred that was displayed on her face. Sirius halted the memory. "Are you sure you don't want to reconsider your application?"

"No Dad." Cassandra answered shakily. "I went to pieces afterwards."

Faith looked appreciatively at Cassandra. "You were damn brave. I'm just sorry you missed the bastard."

"I still killed someone else." Cassandra was afraid to look at anyone else.

H.J. walked over to her and lifted her chin. "It's okay, Cassandra. We aren't going to judge you. You did what you had to. It's a purely visceral reaction to want to defend your family and get back at the person who did that to Sirius."

As Cassandra looked around the room she saw only encouragement and not the disdain she'd half-expected. "Thanks."

Harry squeezed her again. "I don't think we need to see the rest of the memory."

Cassandra turned to Harry. "Can I ask you something?"

"What is it?" Harry was aware of everyone listening to their discourse.

Cassandra lowered her voice a little. "Can I see your first kill?"

"The Death Eater?" Harry enquired.

"Yes." Cassandra didn't know why but she needed to see it after watching herself.

"Of course you can." Harry understood why Cassandra had asked. "Is there anyone else who'd like to see my first kill?"

"I would." Mione had never seen it.

One by one everyone said that they wanted to see it, curiosity getting the better of them. Harry felt a little nervous. "The memory's already in here as it's not one I particularly like having in sharp focus in my own mind."

As the memory progressed, Harry pointed various people out to Faith. "That's me, my brother Jamie, Amicus, Remus, Bella, and Voldemort as he once looked."

When it came time for Harry to kill the Death Eater, Cassandra felt her stomach lurch over as Harry's voice rang out clearly as he cast the killing curse "You almost sounded as if you enjoyed it."

"That's because I did." Harry admitted. "I told you about the rush of power I felt. That's what happens when you become addicted to dark magic."

Cassandra shuddered as the memory continued, and she watched Harry and his world's Remus discuss Harry's use of dark magic. She was horrified at the sight of Harry's eyes. "They're completely black."

"A side effect of my addiction." Harry informed her.

Faith knew how it felt to feel addicted to power as her slayer abilities pretty much provided it on daily basis. "I bet it was tough getting over it, wasn't it?"

"Just a little." Harry didn't reveal how terrible it had been for him, and what he'd done to Remus. The memory then came to an end. "I think we can leave now."

The group emerged and sat down on the chairs they'd shrunk to bring down into the Chamber. "So does anyone have any observations?"

"I do." Faith had been filled in on a little of Harry, Mione and H.J.'s backgrounds and the world they'd come from before she'd arrived. "Sirius said that Voldemort lived quite opulently. Wouldn't he seek the same lifestyle here?"

"I don't know." Harry had no idea. "We're only so well off because of the Basilisk that used to be in here."

Faith looked round. "So where is it now?"

“Gringotts, under a stasis spell to preserve it.” H.J. hadn’t felt comfortable leaving its remains in the school.

Faith sat quietly for a few moments before resuming her original thread of conversation. “Getting back to Voldemort. If he is quite well off, then it shouldn’t be too hard to find an affluent one-armed man, should it?”

“We’ve looked.” Harry told her. “And we can’t find any trace of a one-armed man anywhere.”

“Couldn’t he regrow the arm?” Faith knew that magic was pretty advanced.

“Normally yes but the knife he used prevented it.” Harry informed her. “Which is what is throwing me. I’ve met Dominus and shook his hand. The magic imbued in the knife would have prevented him from reattaching anything to his arm. Even a glamour would fail.”

“Well, he’s obviously swapped bodies with someone then.” Faith said logically. “It’s the only answer.”

“We thought about that.” Mione revealed. “And the only thing we’ve discovered that could possibly do that is an object called the Verto Corpus, but we’ve found nothing to indicate that it’s anything other than a myth.”

Faith looked over at Remus for permission to discuss classified information. “May I?”

“Go ahead.” Remus indicated as he knew what she was going to tell them.

“I’ve swapped bodies with someone before.” Faith watched stunned shock ripple over everyone’s faces, except for Sirius, Xander, and Remus.

Harry scowled as he looked at Xander. “You knew?”

“Yes but the metal device Faith used was destroyed by her after she used it. And the information was deemed classified.” Xander explained why he hadn’t mentioned it. “To reverse the process we had to use a katra to get Buffy back into her body.”

Mione gasped. “You swapped bodies with Buffy?”

“It’s something I prefer to forget but yes.” Faith hated even thinking about what she’d done when she’d masqueraded as Buffy.

“So do you think there’s anything else out there like the device you used?” Harry enquired in a slightly acerbic tone.

“I don’t know.” Faith had no idea. “It was a gift from someone I considered a friend.”

Luna had a theory. “What if the Corpus Verto isn’t a myth or it’s based on something real?”

“How do you know that this Corpus thingy isn’t the item I had?” Faith pointed out.

“Because if it does exist, the Corpus Verto is supposed to be made of glass or stone.” Mione was quite excited to think that they might have a lead.

Her excitement died away as Luna made an observation. “So if it does really exist, it could be anyone out there.” She glanced over apologetically at Mione. “Even Thomas.”

Mione shook her head. “Absolutely not.”

Hermione agreed with her. “Luna, he defended me against Malfoy. Do you really think Voldemort would defend a Muggleborn against a pureblood?”

Luna reluctantly ceded their point. “But still, look at what he did to Draco.”

“And I’d have done worse if I’d have been in Thomas’ shoes.” Remus informed her. “And if we’re talking about people being violent, I’ve seen Harry’s memory of what he did to those men after he lost Mione. You may as well say that Harry could be Dominus.”

Luna, who knew the memory Remus was referring to, changed her argument. “What about the pain he and H.J. both feel?”

“This world is different, Luna.” Mione argued. “Thomas has never done anything, except for what he did to Draco, to show that he might be violent at all. And besides, Gringotts confirmed that he was in a meeting with Bill Weasley all night. You might suspect Thomas but Bill comes from a family that is known to be sympathetic to Muggles, and that includes Bill.”

Luna knew all of the Weasleys extremely well as her mother and Uncle were good friends with the family. “I agree about Bill. However, I’m sorry to continue to argue my point but when I first met Thomas I was uncomfortable around him.”

Katherine reminded Luna of their conversation. “But you said that you were probably tired after the portkey trips, and you later changed your mind.”

“I did but what if I’m wrong?” Luna still refused to back down. “I’m sorry, Mione but we have to look at all the possibilities.”

“You’re right. We do.” Mione answered a little tightly. “But I can tell you now, it’s not my husband.” Mione turned to Harry. “Can I use the pensieve?” When Harry nodded, Mione pulled out the relevant memory she wanted to show everyone, and deposited it inside. “Watch that and still me you think he’s Voldemort. This is from Friday night when I got back from Cleveland.”

The group headed into the pensieve and watched Mione’s memory unfold.

Two Days Earlier

Dropping off her bags, Mione headed for the nursery where she could hear her daughter gurgling delightedly and the deep rumble of her husband's voice. Wanting to see what they were doing without ruining the moment, Mione cast spells on herself before moving silently to the nursery door, which was open. As she peeked in, she found Thomas lying on the floor on his back with Maddie lying on his chest, his arm around her to prevent her from falling, as she played with his face. "Who's Daddy's little angel?"

Thomas blew gently against Maddie's fingers as she touched his lips making her squeal in delight. "Are we going to show Mummy your first tooth when she finishes in her office?"

Maddie had no idea what Thomas was telling her but she grinned at him anyway before grabbing at the tempting piece of hair that was just within her reach as Thomas moved her slightly further up his chest to kiss her cheek.

Thomas winced as his daughter yanked roughly as she tangled her little fingers in his dark hair. "Maddie likes to play rough with Daddy doesn't she? Let go of Daddy's hair."

Mione watched as Thomas disentangled her daughter's fingers from his hair and got to his feet, cradling his daughter against his chest as he did so. "Shall we go see your brother? Shall we go and see Nat?"

"Nnnnn". Maddie spat out at Thomas.

Thomas grinned at his daughter. "Say Nat, Maddie."

Maddie went back to cooing and gurgling, not having the faintest idea of what her Daddy was asking of her. Thomas kissed her head and walked into the bedroom from the nursery.

Theresa, the squib nanny, was reading a book. "Nat's still sleeping, Mr. Thomas. I think his bath wore him out."

"That's alright, Theresa." Thomas walked over to the changing table. "Maddie can join him once I've changed her nappy."

“I can do that.” Theresa went to get up.

“I’ve got it.” Thomas had already divested his daughter of her romper suit. He soon had her free of her dirty nappy before cleaning her up, coating her with baby powder, and putting on a fresh nappy. “Can you fetch me a sleepsuit for her?”

Theresa pulled one of the large bank of drawers that stood against one wall of the bedroom. “Here you go.”

Thomas dressed Maddie who cried as she hated being dressed. Thomas finished snapping her into the sleepsuit before putting her over his shoulder and beginning to rock her. “Shh. It’s all done now.” Suddenly Thomas froze, his wand appearing in his hand, as he turned his body slightly so that his daughter was shielded from the doorway. “Who’s there?”

Mione dropped the spells. “It’s just me.”

Thomas relaxed and reholstered his wand before passing Maddie to Theresa. “I’ll be back to feed them at six.”

“I’ll have their dinner ready and waiting, Mr. Thomas.” Theresa took the little girl from Thomas, smiling as Maddie grinned at her.

Mione felt a little pang as she watched the other woman with her daughter but followed Thomas out to the verandah. “How did you know I was there?”

“I don’t know.” Thomas hadn’t. “I just felt as if I was being watched. How long had you been there?”

“Since you talked about Maddie’s first tooth.” Mione gave a sigh. “When did it happen?”

“Two days ago.” Thomas informed her. “It was going to be a surprise. I was going to let her bite you, just as she did with me. So why did you conceal yourself?”

“I wanted to see you playing naturally with her.” Mione wrapped her arms around Thomas’ waist.

“And what did you think?” Thomas let his arms rest on Mione’s shoulders.

“That you’re really wonderful with her.” Mione told him.

“Right answer.” Thomas dipped his head.

Present Time

The memory ended and Mione turned to the others. “Normally that isn’t a memory I’d share because, as you can see it’s quite private, but I wanted you all to see what’s he like.”

Luna felt uncomfortable after seeing the memory, and didn't say anything. Hermione looked at the others. "I think Mione's proved her point. I couldn't see your Voldemort doing that."

“Neither could I.” H.J. admitted. “So let’s forget about Dominus and Thomas for the moment. Does anyone else have any further comments that might be helpful?”

No-one had, so Sirius made a suggestion. “Why don’t those who have the time, put in some research on anything that might allow a re-growth of Voldemort’s arm or a device to allow him to swap bodies.”

Mione, Remus and Harry all agreed to take it on. After eating lunch, one by one everyone left until just Harry, Cassandra, Sirius and Faith remained. “I take it you want to see some of my memories?”

Faith did. Cassandra also wanted to see some of them again, particularly in light of what she'd done at the Ministry. Sirius waited for Harry to finish putting them into the pensieve. “Perhaps Cassie and Faith would like to get started without us. I’d like a quick word with you.”

Thinking it was work related, Harry agreed. Once the girls had immersed themselves, Sirius addressed the issue he wanted to discuss with Harry. "What exactly is your relationship with my daughter?"

Harry hadn't expected the question. "What do you mean?"

"Are you sleeping with her?" Sirius asked brusquely.

"No!" Harry was quite vehement in his response. "Cass and I are nothing more than friends."

"Are you sure about that?" Sirius was quite persistent.

"Absolutely." Harry conveniently forgot about the kiss they'd shared the previous night.

Sirius let out a breath. "I'm sorry to grill you but when I saw how you two were in the pensieve, I just thought..."

"She's still pretty upset about what she did." Harry pointed out. "As I was with her at the time, and work with her, she uses me as moral support."

Sirius decided to let it drop. "Fair enough. I think we should get inside."

At Sirius' words, the men rejoined the girls in the pensieve.

Next Chapter: Orion makes an excellent observation; The First Pillar; We find out the real reason why Lily and James divorced; Thomas makes a demand of Mione.

Chapter 25Chapter 25: The First Pillar

7th December 2003

Mione left the group and returned home, as did Hermione, Remus, and Xander. H.J., Luna, Orion, and Katherine all went off to the girls' suite, where Katherine fetched drinks for everyone. "Luna, you still look worried."

"I am." Luna took the orange juice from Katherine she offered her. "I know what Mione's shown us is convincing that Thomas is a caring father but it still doesn't mean that he can't be Voldemort."

"I just don't see it." H.J. took the glass of wine Katherine had poured for him. "When I weigh up the pros and cons, I'm afraid it's pretty much top heavy on the pros for him not being Voldemort."

Orion pulled Katherine to sit down on his lap. "I think we need to look at this from a different perspective."

Luna leant against H.J. "Can I use you as a cushion?"

"If you want to." H.J. didn't mind Luna doing so, and put his arm around her shoulders in a friendly gesture.

Once she was comfortable, Luna gave Orion her full attention. "Okay, Orion, what do you want to say?"

"For argument's sake, I won't use a name for whoever Voldemort is now; I'm just going to call him the Donor." Orion hesitated as he put his thoughts in order. "First of all, I think it's more probable that Voldemort has swapped bodies with the Donor, and not regrown his arm."

Everyone agreed with Orion's first point. "Go on."

"So if we can assume he's swapped bodies, how did he get the Donor's memories?" Orion laid out the questions he'd asked himself. "And what happened to the Donor?"

“Are you asking us?” Katherine wasn’t sure if she was supposed to answer Orion's questions or not.

“No. I’m just telling you what I’ve already asked myself.” Orion confirmed. “Initially I thought that Voldemort would simply have ripped out the Donor’s memories, and killed him afterwards. But the more I think about it, the less likely I think it is that the Donor's dead.”

“Based on what?” Katherine wondered what her fiance was building his theory on.

“Rupert Giles.” Orion could see no-one was following his train of thought. “Dad said that Rupert was like a blank slate, and there’s no hope of him ever being the person he once was. Isn’t that exactly what would have happened to the Donor if someone had ripped his memories out? Voldemort wouldn’t have had to kill him. I’m not saying that he didn’t, but why bother to dispose of a body and bring attention to yourself, when you could just leave your victim somewhere and disappear? No-one’s ever going to know who a man without a memory is, are they?”

Luna tilted her head in her usual manner as she thought about what Orion had said. “You’ve got a very good point.”

H.J. also acknowledged it. “I think we need to return to the Chamber. Harry and Sirius have probably already thought of this but it won’t hurt to make sure.”

The group all got up and retraced their steps back into the Chamber.

Inside the pensieve, Cassandra jumped as Orion suddenly appeared beside her. “Orion, what’s wrong?”

“I need to speak to Dad and Harry.” Orion informed the group.

A few minutes later Sirius had listened to what his son had to say. “That’s a very good point, Orion. We hadn’t connected the Donor and Rupert.”

Orion went red with pleasure. "Thanks Dad."

Luna stared at Orion. "You really should have been in Ravenclaw."

Orion looked a little sheepishly at Luna. "I could have been. The hat gave me a choice."

Sirius was dumbfounded. "And you chose Hufflepuff?"

"Yes." Orion explained his reasoning. "If I'd gone into Ravenclaw I'd have had to live up to Cassandra. I can still remember you and Uncle James crowing over how good she was. If you remember she took first place in every single subject in her first year, and I didn't want the pressure of ending up disappointing you when I wasn't as good as she was."

Cassandra was horrified. "Oh Ori. I never knew."

"It's not your fault, Cass." Orion consoled his sister. "And besides, I'm happy in Hufflepuff."

"But if you could have been in Ravenclaw, then why are your marks barely above average?" Sirius frowned at his son. "Particularly when you can apply deductive reasoning to come up with something Harry and I both missed."

"I knew I wouldn't have to try as hard if I was in Hufflepuff." Orion wished he'd kept his mouth shut about the hat, as he answered his father truthfully. "Everyone considers us the leftovers."

Sirius wasn't happy at what Orion had confessed. "I've always been proud of you as I believed you were working to your best potential, and I wouldn't have been disappointed if you'd gone into Ravenclaw and done your best and failed. But I am disappointed to learn that you have the capability to do better, and you've simply elected to coast by. I expect you to finish your final year in the top five, Orion. I also expect you to prove yourself in your mock exams in two weeks' time."

“Yes Sir.” Orion knew that his easy life was now over, and that he’d have to work hard to catch up.

After he’d finished berating his son, Sirius turned to Harry. “Based on Orion’s theory, I think it wouldn’t hurt to try and track down our missing donor, if he’s still alive.”

“How will that help though?” Katherine asked.

“It will help me to confirm that a body swap has taken place, and Voldemort hasn’t regrown the arm.” Sirius told her, before addressing Harry again. “Harry, I know it’s a full moon tomorrow but as from Tuesday I want you to take a leave of absence for two weeks. You out of everyone else will be able to detect if the donor has Voldemort’s body by his scent. I’ll drop by and ask James if I can borrow you.”

Harry turned to Cassandra. “Can you manage for two weeks?”

“If Dad needs you, then I’ll have to.” Cassandra wasn’t exactly happy about it.

Sirius turned to his son. “I’m sure Orion can help you mark the junior students’ papers.”

Orion wanted to protest that he’d now have more than enough to do but sensibly kept his objections to himself. “I’ll help you Cass.”

“Thanks, Ori.” Cassandra had no intention of making her brother help her, as she knew how hard he was going to have to work to play catch-up before the end of term mock tests he was going to have to sit as part of his NEWTs.

Sirius had one more thing he wanted to discuss. “I don’t think we should mention this conversation to Mione. I don’t want her mentioning anything to Thomas, even though we don’t believe it is him. I know what we discussed earlier was covered by the Fidelius but that’s not the case anymore.”

“Are you still going to stay with her over Christmas?” Katherine wondered if Luna would change her mind.

“As I can’t prove anything, and I think she’d be hurt if I backed out, I am going to.” Luna confirmed. “And I don’t want to disappoint Xander as he’s been looking forward to it for ages.”

“I think we should all use the time there to observe Thomas more closely. I want people to listen to any conversations he may have with any of the other guests, particularly Malfoy.” Sirius instructed the group. “But don’t make it obvious.”

“Malfoy is going?” Cassandra pulled a face. “I’m not sure I want to go if Draco is going to be there.”

“He’s not.” H.J. told her. “Mione said that it’s only going to be Lucius and Narcissa, as Draco is no longer welcome.”

Harry had been invited as well, but hadn’t responded to Mione’s request yet. “I’m probably not going.”

Cassandra scowled at him. “You’re not leaving me alone with Alex Seville because he’s the only other single person who’s going to be there.”

Harry didn’t get a chance to protest that Remus, James, and Lavinia and Grimstock Lovegood were also going to be there, as Mione had wanted to keep everyone’s families together at Christmas. Luna had been beyond surprised when her mother had accepted the invitation.

“I want you there.” Sirius informed Harry. “Your hearing is going to be invaluable.”

Not having much choice, Harry relented. “I’ll go then but it’s going to be uncomfortable being around Thomas and Mione.”

“Sorry Harry, but I need you.” Sirius sympathized with Harry’s position but he wasn’t willing to relent. “Right, I’m going to see

James.” He kissed Cassandra on the cheek. “Make sure Orion helps you.”

“I will Dad.” Cassandra had little choice except to agree. “I’ll see you in a couple of weeks.”

Sirius and the others then left. Harry wondered why Cassandra hadn’t made a move. “What’s up?”

“I want to learn how to defend myself.” Cassandra told him. “I know you used to teach classes at Auror Division. I was wondering if you could show me what it was like.”

“Can we discuss this when I get back from helping your Dad out?” Harry had packing to do as he knew that it was likely he would be travelling abroad.

“Of course.” Cassandra then followed Harry out of the room.

13th December 2003

Mione wandered into Thomas’ study. “Do you have any spare quills? I don’t know what I’ve done with all of mine.”

Thomas gave a slightly indulgent smile. “I think you’ve probably eaten them.”

Mione grinned. “Probably. So do you have any?”

Thomas opened his drawer as Mione came to stand by him. “Here.”

Mione noticed the Muggle book that was lying on top of the papers in the drawer. “The Fountain of Youth?” She pushed the drawer closed so that she could get by to sit on Thomas’ lap. “Feeling old are we?”

“It was for some research I’ve been doing.” Thomas had forgotten it was in the drawer.

“Why do you want to know about a supposed Muggle myth?” Mione couldn’t help but ask.

“Because it’s going to help me take over the world.” Thomas answered honestly.

Thinking he was joking, Mione laughed and kissed him on the cheek before getting back up. “It might make you look younger but that’s all it will do. Anyway, if what I’ve read is true, then it’s not a fountain as everyone believes but a spell.”

Thomas grabbed Mione's wrist, stopping her from moving away. “What do you know about it?”

“You’re really interested?” Mione had thought that Thomas had been joking about doing research on it.

“If you want to tell me.” Thomas pulled Mione back down onto his lap.

Mione wondered what Thomas’ true interest in it was. “So are you going to tell me why you're really researching it?”

“I’ve already told you it's going to help me take over the world.” Thomas answered in a teasing voice.

“Keep your secrets then.” Mione leant back against him. “I found mention of a spell called the Fountain of Youth when I was reading one of the books in your Antiquities library. The only reason I can remember is because I found it amusing that even wizards had subscribed to the same ridiculous belief as Muggles.”

“Can you remember which book?” Thomas wrapped his arms around Mione’s waist as he asked.

“I’m afraid not as I’ve read through quite a few but if you get your pensieve, I can try and locate the memory.” Mione was pretty sure that she’d seen mention of it in one of the older spellbooks she’d looked through.

“Or I could use Legilimency.” Thomas offered.

Mione shook her head. “I don’t like the idea of anyone looking inside my head.”

“Not even me?” Thomas asked, knowing very well why Mione didn’t want him inside her head.

“Not even you.” Mione gave a shudder. “It’s just a little creepy.”

“Let me get my pensieve then.” Thomas lifted Mione off his lap and went over to his wall, before casting a few spells and sliding open a panel.

Mione took the partially filled pensieve from him and removed several memories which she believed might be the correct ones. “Do you need me to come in with you?”

“No.” Thomas smiled at his wife. “Like you, I prefer to keep most of what is in my head to myself.”

Mione stood back and waited. Once inside the pensieve, Thomas started the first memory and watched his wife sitting cross-legged on the floor of the library as she read a large and very old book. Not finding what he wanted, he moved onto the next memory where Mione was sitting at a desk reading a much smaller but equally old book. As she turned a page and snorted at what she’d found, Thomas spotted what Mione had thought she’d seen about the Fountain. He therefore froze the memory and checked exactly where it was in the book before withdrawing. “Thank you, Mione. That was most helpful.”

Mione took the memories back while Thomas returned the pensieve to the wall. “If there’s anything else I can help with, then tell me. You know how much I like research.”

“There might be.” Thomas decided to include Mione in his search for some of the Pillars. “But this project is somewhat sensitive.”

Mione frowned. "I'd never tell anyone about your business dealings. You should know that."

"I didn't think you would." Thomas could see he'd ruffled his wife's feathers. "Sit down, and I'll tell you a little about what I'm looking for."

Mione promptly sat back on his lap. "So what can I help you with?"

"I'm trying to track down something called the Validus Saxus." Thomas didn't see any recognition on Mione's face. "Apparently it's a power base."

Mione knew that one of Richard Seville's hybrid companies was doing research into alternative power sources, and she presumed it was for this. "Any leads?"

"It's supposed to be located somewhere in Myanmar, and I believe it might be a ruby." Thomas told her all the information he had.

Mione had never heard of it. "I'll see what I can find. Is there anything else I can help with?"

"That's it for the moment." Thomas nuzzled his wife's neck. "But don't worry if you don't find anything. I don't want you to take time away from your latest project."

"I take it Rebecca told you that she'd asked me to sit on the Foundation's board." Mione tilted her head to allow Thomas better access to her neck.

"She did." Thomas' mother had asked for his opinion before she'd approached Mione. "I sometimes wish you'd give up your current job, and take on the work at the Foundation part-time instead."

"I love my job." Thomas had asked Mione to consider giving it up just after they'd gotten married. "If a time comes when I don't, then I'll think about it."

“I just hate that I don’t see that much of you during the week.” Thomas started to unbutton Mione’s blouse as he spoke.

Mione put her hand over his, stopping him. “Does it really bother you that much?”

“Yes.” Thomas admitted. “But I know how important your work is to you.”

“Remus has already offered me an assistant so that I can work less hours if I want to.” Mione revealed.

Thomas frowned. “Why didn’t you mention this before?”

“Because I have no intention of cutting back on my hours.” Mione hadn’t seen the point in telling Thomas as she didn’t intend to take up Remus’ offer.

“When did he offer?” Thomas enquired.

“Just after we got married.” Mione could see that Thomas was troubled that she hadn’t told him.

“Is the offer open ended?” Thomas resumed opening Mione’s blouse.

“Yes.” Mione shivered as Thomas slipped his hand inside her blouse to wrap it around her waist.

“I want you to tell Remus you’ll take the offer.” Thomas stood up forcing Mione onto her feet.

“I’m not sure I want to.” Mione found herself backed against the lip of the desk top.

“Don’t you want to spend more time with me?” Thomas pushed Mione’s blouse from off her shoulders.

“I don’t think that’s a fair question.” Mione put her hands on Thomas’ shoulders to stop him lowering his head to kiss her neck. “And I can’t have a serious discussion while you’re doing that.”

Thomas sighed and pulled Mione’s blouse back up onto her shoulders. “I know I said I would support you in your decision to work, and I will. But I also know that I want my wife at home with me and our children.”

Mione scowled. “That’s a bit of an old-fashioned attitude, especially given Rebecca’s position in your Dad’s companies and at the Foundation.”

“Mum stayed at home until Alex had started at Berowra Academy.” Thomas informed Mione. “And she cut back during the holidays so that she could spend time with her children.”

“I didn’t realize.” Mione had thought that Rebecca had always worked.

Thomas lifted Mione so that she was sitting on his desk. “I think it’s important that you’re here while the twins are so young, because you’re missing out on so much when you’re not. You missed Nat’s first attempt to talk.”

“Bbbbb is hardly a word.” Mione pointed out, even as she felt a shaft of guilt go through her. “It’s going to be a couple of months yet before they really begin to try.”

“Maddie had her first tooth for two days before you even saw her.” Thomas reminded her. “And you weren’t here when Nat was sick.”

“You said you had it under control.” Mione always felt remorseful when she couldn’t see her children, particularly as Thomas spent the majority of time with them.

“I did.” Thomas allowed. “But it still doesn’t mean that I wouldn’t have liked to have you here as well.”

Mione gnawed on her bottom lip as she thought about what Thomas had said. "I suppose I could talk to Remus next week about possibly cutting back but I'm not promising anything."

Thomas wasn't one not to press an advantage, and dangled a carrot in front of his wife. "If you agree to cut back, you can help me with my research. I have several projects you could help with but they're not time critical so it doesn't matter if the children take up your time. That way you can spend time with them and me."

Mione's curiosity about learning more about the company and Thomas' work was too much of a temptation for her. "I'll consider cutting back to four days."

"I want you to cut back to two days." Thomas demanded.

"I need to be in work more than that." Mione argued.

"Two and half then." Thomas countered. "And I'll spend the time you're in work at our London house so that we can spend more time together."

Mione gave him her final offer. "Three days."

Thomas reluctantly agreed to Mione's offer. "Three it is but I don't want you bringing work home when you're supposed to be with me."

Knowing that Thomas preferred the Island and wasn't particularly fond of London, in return for his concession Mione agreed to Thomas' condition. "I'll tell Remus he needs to find an assistant then."

"Thank you." Having gotten what he wanted, Thomas slipped Mione's blouse back down. "Now where were we?"

Mione gave a giggling gasp as Thomas pushed her back down across his desk, and covered her body with his own.

14th December 2003

As she reached the door to the office she was sharing with her Dad, Katherine could hear raised voices. She was staggered to recognize Lily's voice. "It's bad enough she's marrying his son."

After knocking and entering the room, Katherine closed the door behind her and cast a silencing spell. "What's going on? I could hear you before I even got in here."

Lily smiled brightly at her daughter. "We're just discussing the arrangements for your wedding to Orion."

"So I heard." Katherine informed her mother. "What do you mean by the remark you just made? Don't you like Orion?"

"It's not Orion I have a problem with." Lily glared at James as she said it. "It's his bloody father."

"Uncle Sirius?" Katherine was confused.

"He's not your Uncle." Lily snapped.

"And Severus isn't my Dad but it didn't stop you from trying to encourage me to call him Father, did it?" Katherine answered in just as snotty a voice as her mother.

"Perhaps the two of you might have gotten along a little better if you had." Lily pointed out. "He and Harry have a wonderful relationship."

"Let's be honest, Mum." Katherine decided to be blunt. "I'm never going to have a relationship with that man like Harry has. Severus hates me and the feeling's entirely mutual."

"Of course he doesn't hate you." Lily didn't look at her daughter as she said it.

"Believe what you want, Mum." Katherine couldn't be bothered to argue the point. "So would one of you like to tell me exactly what this argument was about?"

James and Lily looked at each other. James shook his head. "Not particularly."

Lily shrugged, and grinned in a nasty manner at James. "I don't know what your problem is. I don't mind if she knows."

All at once, James' usually easy-going demeanor vanished as his temper flared at his former wife's declaration. "You really are a bitch. I should never have married you."

"The feeling's entirely mutual." Lily snapped back. "Especially given that our children are the only good things to come out of it. I suppose I should be grateful for your sense of obligation."

"Fuck you." James snarled.

Katherine was a little taken aback at her father's viciousness towards her mother. "Mum, what do you mean by obligation?"

"I can't tell you." Lily answered simply.

Katherine realized there was more to Lily's demurral than a simple refusal. "Have you sworn an oath or something?"

"Yes, actually I have." Lily told her. "So only he can answer your question."

"And I said to forget it." James glared even harder at Lily.

Lily couldn't resist baiting her ex-husband. "Just tell her, James. Don't you want to be honest with your daughter?"

James decided to tell Katherine the partial truth. "I only married your mother because I was obliged to do so to carry on the family line."

"So what's the big deal about that? You wouldn't be the first pureblood to do so." Katherine caught the look her mother sent her father as she responded. "Hold on. There's more to it than that, isn't

there? No way would anyone swear an oath to keep something like that secret.”

“I was in love with someone else when I married Lily.” James admitted as his daughter pushed.

Katherine couldn’t understand why James had married Lily at all. “Dad, if you were in love with this other woman and needed to carry on the family line, why didn’t you simply marry her instead?”

James wouldn’t meet Katherine’s eyes. “I just didn’t.”

Katherine frowned. “Was she married to someone else?”

Lily couldn’t tell Katherine anymore than she already had. “It’s up to your Dad to answer the question.”

James glance at Lily was filled with pure venom. “Why couldn’t you just drop it?”

“And why don’t you just tell your daughter?” Lily countered.

“Dad, you can tell me.” Katherine said softly. “Nothing you can say will change how I feel about you.”

“I think it might.” Lily interjected.

“Mum, please shut up.” After snapping at her mother, Katherine faced James. “Dad, you can tell me.”

James didn’t trust Lily not to find a way around her oath, and swallowing hard he told his daughter. “Because I wasn’t in love with another woman.”

Katherine was stunned at what James’ statement implied. ““Who was he, Dad?”

James’ face was completely bereft of color, and his voice was shaking as he responded. “I can’t tell you that, so please don’t ask.”

Lily snorted at James' evasion. "Don't be such a bloody coward. You've told her this much. Why don't you just tell her the rest? Come on James, I thought you, like your bloody precious friend, valued honesty above all else."

Katherine's hand flew to her mouth as she suddenly realized who her mother was talking about, and the relevance behind the remark she'd overheard when she first got to the rooms. "Oh Merlin. You don't mean it's..."

Before Katherine could finish her sentence, James stalked off into his adjoining rooms before slamming the door behind him. Katherine turned on Lily. "Exactly what did you expect to achieve by telling me?"

"Doesn't it bother you?" Lily asked in a disgusted voice. "Our marriage was based on a lie. I thought James loved me."

In light of Lily's own vindictive nature, Katherine decided to find out how her mother had felt about her Dad before she made any judgments. "And were you in love with Dad when you married him?"

"What's that got to do with it?" Lily avoided the question.

"Everything." Katherine crossed her arms. "You're the one who's going on about honesty. So tell me, Mum, were you in love with Dad?"

Hoisted by her own petard, Lily answered the question. "No, I wasn't."

"Why did you marry him then?" Katherine hadn't appreciated how much she hadn't known about her parents' marriage.

"I was a half-blood who had a squib for a sister so given your father's position as a member of wizarding nobility, it was a very good match for me." Lily explained.

Katherine was disgusted. "So you cold-bloodedly set out to marry Dad?"

“I didn’t have to try very hard.” Lily said in a voice dripping with condescension.

“What about Severus?” Katherine had heard the rumors about Severus' feelings for her mother. “I heard that he was in love with you before you married Dad. Why didn’t you just get together with him instead?”

“I could have; Severus asked me to marry him just before I left school. However, Severus and your Dad never got on at school, and because I thought Severus had asked to try to get one over on James, I refused.” While Lily had regretted refusing Severus then, she knew that she wouldn't have had her children if she had accepted, and for that reason alone she was grateful for her marriage to James.

Katherine knew only too well about the rivalry that had existed while James and Severus had been at school together, but she believed that as adults they'd put it behind them. “Yet Dad and Severus both work together now.”

“It still doesn’t mean they like each other.” Lily made a good point. “And you should be grateful they do work together, as it’s the only reason you saw as much as your father as you did.”

Katherine had a question. “I always presumed that we lived with you because you and Dad agreed to it. But I’ve now got a feeling that that’s not the case. Dad’s the pureblood, so why didn’t he get custody of us?”

Lily knew that James would likely tell Katherine if she didn't. “I promised James that if I could have custody of you and Harry, then I'd never tell anyone why we got divorced.”

Katherine was furious. “I had to live with you and Severus because you blackmailed Dad?”

“I wanted you with me.” Lily, for all of her faults, loved her children.

"I hated living with Severus." Katherine spat out. "And you knew it; just like you knew Severus hated me. I'm surprised he's even going to my wedding."

"He's going because I need his support to get through the day." Lily was well aware that Severus hadn't taken to Katherine in the same way he had to Harry; something that had become more evident when Katherine made Gryffindor and Harry, Slytherin. "I'll be honest with you, Katherine. I absolutely loath your father and Sirius Black, and the thought of having to watch James laugh and joke with him during your wedding sickens me."

"Then don't go." Katherine said bluntly. "Because I'm telling you now, if you make a scene during the most important day of my life, I swear I'll never speak to you again."

Lily looked at her daughter through new eyes as Katherine stood up for herself. "You're more like me than I thought. I always thought you were more like James."

"I'd disagree." Katherine found herself not wanting to be anything like her mother. "I'd never do anything like you did."

"I did it out of love." Lily argued.

Katherine only partially believed Lily. "I believe you love Harry and me but I also think you wanted us to get back at Dad because you knew how much it would hurt him."

Lily didn't meet Katherine's eyes. "How could you believe I'd do something like that?"

Katherine stared at Lily as if she didn't recognize her. "Then why didn't you look at me when you answered? How could you, Mum? You used Harry and me as pawns to score points against Dad. I've always believed that you put mine and Harry's best interests first, but you didn't. You just wanted to get back at Dad. How can I ever trust you again?"

“You can.” Lily protested.

“No, Mum, I can’t.” Katherine had heard enough. “Because of your hatred towards Dad, not only did you force me to live with a man I hate but you also tried to ruin my relationship with Dad today. You disgust me.”

“You’ve got no right to talk to me like this.” Lily answered Katherine crossly. “I’m your mother.”

“Most mothers wouldn’t use their children as pawns.” Katherine turned away, only for Lily to grab her arm.

Lily was now incensed by Katherine’s attitude towards her. “Were you ever mistreated?”

“Not by you.” Katherine admitted. “But Severus was never pleasant to me, and that made my time in his home miserable.”

“You could have been more pleasant to him.” Lily argued. “It was your choice to be continually belligerent towards him.”

“And it was your choice to take me.” Katherine pulled her arm free. “Just as it was your choice to try and ruin my relationship with Dad. You really are a piece of work, and right now I don’t want anything to do with you.”

At Katherine’s words, Lily stormed off out of the room. James opened the adjoining door to the office at Katherine’s knock. “Is she gone?”

“Yes.” Katherine told her father what had gone on between her and Lily. “I can’t stop shaking.”

James walked over to the cupboard on the far side of the room, and took out a calming potion which he handed to Katherine. “I’m so sorry that you had to go through this. I should have stood up to your mother when she first made her demands.”

Katherine didn't agree with James. "Dad, you know what this society is like. If you'd stood up to Mum and she'd told anyone, you'd have had no job, most people would have shunned you and we'd have paid the price as well. You wouldn't have been allowed to see us."

"I don't think I could have coped if that had happened." James admitted. "But I'm probably going to lose you anyway."

"No, Dad, you're not. " Katherine could tell that James still thought she was going to reject him. "Dad, how did Mum find out?"

"I don't think we should really go into that." James didn't want to portray Lily in a poor light even after what she'd done.

Katherine couldn't believe that James would have simply told Lily. "Please Dad. I know everything else. You may as well tell me."

James hated thinking about the argument that had effectively ended his marriage. "Things hadn't been going well between us since before Harry was born. About six weeks after his birth, we had the worst argument we'd ever had, and I told Lily how I really felt about marrying her. I didn't mean to; it just slipped out in anger. Neither of us said anything about it for several days so I thought she'd decided to simply ignore it. However, about a week later I was drinking wine with dinner when I started to feel lightheaded. I only realized what was wrong when Lily petrified me, and began to ask questions."

Katherine was appalled. "She used Veritaserum on you?"

"Yes." James could see that Katherine was taking it as badly as he thought she would. "She asked who I was in love with, and unable to lie I told her. From there things just got worse. Basically it ended up that if I agreed to sign over full custody of you and Harry, with visitation rights only for me, she'd keep quiet about what she'd found out."

"That must have been awful for you." Katherine could only guess at how horrible it must have been for James.

"It was probably the worst time of my life." James admitted. "What's made it harder is that Harry has never really formed any connection with me. I'm closer to you and I always have been."

Katherine knew that her brother preferred Severus to James. "Do you think Harry knows?"

James shook his head. "No. While Lily could drop enough hints for you to pick up on without breaking her vow, which is why I told you the truth today, your brother isn't nearly as astute, even though he likes to think he is. And as much as it pains me to say it, unlike you, I couldn't trust Harry to keep his mouth shut."

"You're right. He's a little too much like Mum." Katherine knew that like Lily, Harry wouldn't hesitate to blackmail their Dad into getting something he wanted. "Dad, can I ask you something else?"

"Yes." James answered simply.

"Is the reason you wanted to see either Harry or I get together with one of Sirius' children because of how you felt about him?" Katherine asked nervously.

James immediately shook his head. "No. My feelings for Sirius have absolutely nothing to do with our wanting our children to get together."

"Are you still in love with him?" Katherine asked.

"No." James answered without hesitation. "My feelings for him are just purely of friendship and respect now."

"Do Uncle Remus and Uncle Peter know?" Katherine wanted to make sure she was totally au fait with the truth.

"Remus does." James had told his friend one night after Remus had found him sitting in the dark completely smashed. "He's the one who helped me get over Sirius."

“You and Uncle Remus?” Katherine thought she’d endured enough shocks.

James laughed. “No. But he listened to me every time I needed someone to, and he never once judged me.”

Katherine hesitated before asking her next question. “Does Uncle Sirius know?”

“I think he might have suspected how I felt but he’s never said anything.” James knew even if Sirius had known, he’d never had acted on his feelings. “And it’s only Sirius who I’ve ever felt like that about. Everyone else I’ve ever liked since then has been female.”

“So why haven’t you ever remarried?” Katherine couldn’t ever remember seeing a woman with James.

“Because I couldn’t go through marrying again.” James took his daughter’s hand. “Katherine, I hope this doesn’t affect how you feel about Orion.”

“It doesn’t, Dad.” Katherine reassured him. “I love Orion because he’s Orion, and not because he’s Uncle Sirius’ son.”

James was glad to hear it. “Katherine, unlike me, I don’t want you to base any part of your marriage on a lie so if you want to tell Orion about what has happened today, you can.”

Katherine appreciated James’ offer. “Dad, if it ever comes up, then I’ll tell him but to be truthful, unless I have to explain about Mum, it’s something I’d rather keep between us.”

James understood. “I think we can leave the marking until tomorrow. Strangely enough I’m not really in the mood right now.”

“I’m going to head back to my rooms, then.” Katherine hugged James. “I love you Dad.”

James felt pure relief run through him at Katherine's words. "I love you, Kittie Kat."

Katherine grinned at her Dad's pet name for her. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Only once his daughter had left did James pour himself a large scotch, and sit down to brood.

Katherine hadn't been back in her rooms for more than ten minutes when a knock came at the door. As Luna was in the bath, and Cassandra had taken over Harry's rooms in his absence, Katherine sighed and opened it to find her brother standing there. "Harry. This is a surprise."

"What's going on, Katherine?" Harry marched into the room. "Mum's having a meltdown. I heard your and James' names mentioned. Whatever you've done, she's really pissed."

"His name is Dad, not James." Katherine hated it when Harry called their father, James. "And we had a bit of a falling out over some of the attendees who are coming to my wedding. Mum isn't exactly enamored of all of them."

"That's nothing new." Harry had already heard Lily whinging about it, so he just took Katherine's answer at face value. "Katherine, while I'm here, can you do me a favor?"

"I'm not loaning you money." Katherine was fed up with Harry overspending and coming to her.

"I don't need money." Harry wanted something else. "Do you know what color dress Cassandra is wearing to the Yule Ball?"

"Yes, why?" Katherine didn't entirely trust her brother.

"Because I want to get her some flowers to match it." Harry explained.

Katherine narrowed her eyes. "And that's the only reason?"

"What other reason would I have?" Harry answered innocently.

Katherine decided it couldn't hurt to tell him. "She's wearing a very dark red dress."

"Thank you." Harry kissed his sister on the cheek. "You're an angel."

Katherine frowned as Harry left. It wasn't like him to be so affectionate.

Harry whistled his way back to Draco's suite, and let himself in. "Well I got the information."

"Do you really think buying flowers to match her dress will make a difference?" Draco glanced over at his friend.

"I've known Cassandra for ages." Harry pointed out. "And she's a sap when it comes to things like that."

Blaise, who was stretched out on the sofa, his girlfriend lying on top of him, acknowledged Harry's remark. "He does have a point, Draco. And he's already ahead in the betting pool just by getting her to accompany him."

"I still don't know how you managed it." Draco hadn't expected Cassandra to say yes to Harry, particularly as she'd already refused him.

"As I've already said, I've known Cassandra for a long time." Harry smirked as he leant against the fireplace, holding his hands out to catch the heat.

Blaise, never one to let an opportunity pass him by, glanced thoughtfully at Harry. "Do you want to increase the bet?"

"What to?" Harry was almost as bad as Blaise.

“You’ve already made 300 galleons, and that’s yours no matter what.” Blaise was in charge of keeping the money. “So how about we say if you get to kiss her, ten galleons instead of the five we originally agreed.”

“Per kiss?” Harry asked.

Blaise baulked. “I’m not that stupid. If you get further than kissing her, then the bet goes up.”

Draco was suddenly interested again, and jumped in with what he thought would be a good bet. “Twenty galleons for above the waist, forty for below. If you can actually bed her, then it’s a hundred galleons.”

“What proof?” Harry asked.

“A memory is fine.” Blaise didn’t need more than that. “So are you in?”

“There’s no way she’ll sleep with me, so you can forget about the hundred galleon bet.” Harry quickly worked out that he’d lose just over half of his money if he got nowhere with Cassandra, but he was willing to take a chance as he’d already made a good profit from winning the original pool. “But I’m game for the rest.”

Ginny lifted her head from kissing Blaise’s neck. “I’m in then.”

“Me too.” Blaise confirmed. “Draco?”

“Oh yes.” Draco smirked at Harry. “It’s time to win some of that money I lost to you back.”

Next Chapter: We find out what Harry discovered about the Donor; Cassandra gets to see what Harry was like as Head Auror when she sees a memory of him putting a bunch of new recruits through their paces; Mione tells Remus about her decision.

Chapter 26: All About Harry

18th December 2003

Harry sleepily opened his door as he'd only arrived back from California a few hours earlier, and he was exhausted as the entire time he'd been away had involved a lot of travelling, very long days, and no time off. "Cassandra?"

"I should have known better." Cassandra was fuming as she barged in past Harry.

"Don't tell me, Potter was after a little more than friendship." Harry closed the door behind him.

"It was like being on a date with an octopus." Cassandra was spitting mad. "To say nothing of the fact that he only asked me out because the boys from Slytherin had a bet to see who could, I quote, 'pull the hottest piece of ass here'. Apparently being young and a teacher, I placed at number one."

Harry could see that Cassandra wasn't the slightest bit impressed by her ranking. "How did you find out?"

"Ginny Weasley told me." Cassandra scowled. "That girl has to be the biggest bitch ever as I'm sure she didn't tell me to be nice."

Harry had the distinct impression that the Slytherins would be having a tough time when Cassandra covered classes in future for him. "So what did you do?"

"As I only discovered that delightful piece of information about ten minutes ago, it was a little too late to do anything." Cassandra gave a frustrated scream. "Ooh. I've a good mind to tell Uncle James about his behavior." Cassandra marched into Harry's kitchenette and poured herself a glass of wine from the bottle that Harry had opened just before he went to bed. "Do you want one?"

“No thanks.” Harry yawned and dropped onto the sofa. “So do you want me to punish him after the break?”

“No, I had the pleasure of slapping his face myself.” Cassandra’s hand was still smarting. “I can’t believe I fell for his polite act.”

“I’m the one who said you should give him a chance.” Harry pointed out.

“Which is why I’m here venting off right now.” Cassandra tartly informed him. “Anyway, thanks for the wine. I’m off to bed.”

Harry watched Cassandra pick up the almost full bottle. “You’re taking my wine?”

“As you so correctly pointed out, it was your idea to say yes, so yes I am.” Cassandra bent over to kiss Harry on the cheek, inadvertently giving Harry a view straight down her dress.

Despite not meaning to, Harry couldn’t help but steal a look. “Goodnight Cassandra.”

Bidding Harry goodnight, Cassandra didn’t realize what she’d done. “Goodnight, Harry.”

Harry knew he couldn’t not tell her. “Cassandra?”

“Yes Harry?” Cassandra hesitated at the door to the office.

“Next time, be careful when you’re bending over in a dress like that.” Harry watched Cassandra go bright red. “I could see straight down it when you leant over to kiss me goodnight.”

“Thank you for pointing it out, Harry.” Cassandra angrily pulled open the door. “But unless you want to be classed down in the gutter with Potter, I suggest that next time you have the decency to close your eyes.”

Harry winced as Cassandra slammed the door behind her.

The Next Day

Harry walked into his sitting room to find Cassandra sitting at his table, and eating his toast. After her remonstrance of him the previous night, he'd expected her to avoid him. Cassandra smiled brightly. "Hi Harry."

"You look chipper. How much of my wine did you drink last night?" Harry poured himself a cup of tea from the pot the house-elves had delivered together with his breakfast.

"Half a glass." Cassandra had ended up hurling the wineglass at the wall as she'd thought about Harry Potter and his roaming hands. "I owe you a new glass by the way."

Harry guessed what had happened to the innocent wineglass. "It doesn't matter. I want to apologize for my comment last night. I didn't mean anything by it. I just wanted to warn you."

"I'm aware of that, otherwise I wouldn't be here now." Cassandra assured him. "I only bit your head off because I was so angry with Potter."

"Are you going to report him to James?" Harry sighed as he took a mouthful of tea.

"No. I'm going to deal with him myself." Cassandra smirked.

Harry suspected his suspicions about Cassandra making Harry's life miserable were correct. "So how did you get on during my absence? Did Orion help you?"

"A little." Cassandra had mostly spent her time with Orion coaching him on the couple of subjects he was a little weak in. "But he offered."

"I won't say anything to Sirius." Harry promised.

"How did your investigation go?" Cassandra bit into her toast as she asked.

“After a lot of travelling and investigative work, we managed to eventually narrow our search down to three one-armed men being held in state facilities throughout the world who’d been admitted within the last ten years.” Harry bit into a piece of toast as well, and made Cassandra wait for the rest of the news as he ate it.

“Stop teasing and tell me.” Cassandra ordered.

“Orion was right. Voldemort didn’t kill his donor.” When Harry had seen the man in the San Diego facility, Harry had known that the body at least had once belonged to Voldemort; not only had he been recognizable, but his scent had given him away.

“And did you manage to find out who the donor was?” Cassandra leant across the table, excited to hear what Harry had to say.

“Not exactly.” Harry answered cryptically as he picked up another piece of toast, and began eating.

“Harry, stop eating breakfast and just tell me.” Cassandra whined.

Harry put down his toast. “The hospital staff said that he had no identification on him when he was brought in. But in spite of his condition, he seemed to understand them and followed their simple commands. However, they’ve made little headway in trying to get him to speak except for one phrase which he repeats over and over again, ‘My baby’s an FBW.’”

Cassandra was unable to make head or tail of the phrase. “What does that mean?”

“Not a clue.” Harry and Sirius had both also come up empty. “The staff think that he’s learnt it from the television that was constantly playing in his room.”

“Could you get anything from him at all?” Cassandra finished off the pile of toast.

“Your Dad tried Legilimency but the guy’s mind is just like Rupert’s. Given the state of his mind, we were surprised to learn that he could speak at all.” Harry and Sirius had been frustrated by their results.

“Is he magical at all?” Cassandra stole Harry's yogurt from under his nose as she asked.

“Barely.” Harry scowled but let Cassandra take it. “Whoever stripped his mind did a power transfer as well, so if Voldemort’s out there, he’s not only imbued with most of his original strength but whatever strength his donor had as well.”

“That makes Voldemort even more dangerous then.” Cassandra guessed.

“I’d say so.” Harry agreed. “Unless his donor was a squib.”

“So what conclusion have you come to?” Cassandra couldn’t see that they were any better off from locating the donor, except for learning that Voldemort hadn’t regrown his arm, and was probably more powerful than he once had been.

“It’s a little difficult to come to any sort of useful conclusion. Finding the donor has only made Rupert’s condition all the more puzzling as we know that Voldemort didn’t take Rupert’s body.” Harry and Sirius were still stumped as to how Rupert had ended up in the condition he had. “As for our donor, we’ve had one Frank Barrett Williams transferred to St. Mungo’s where we can monitor him. The staff in San Diego named him after the initials he keeps repeating.”

“So we still have no idea who Voldemort is then.” Cassandra sounded dejected.

“Not really, no.” Harry yawned widely. “Sorry I’ve got portkey lag. You should see your poor Dad; he was dead on his feet when we apparated back to the Ministry.”

Cassandra had to admit that Harry did look a little drawn. “So how bad was it?”

Harry picked up the pepper-up potion he'd decided to take. "We pursued leads in fourteen countries over the twelve days before narrowing things down to three facilities. The San Diego facility was the last one we looked at." Harry frowned as he hated the feeling of the steam that came out of his ears as the potion did its job.

"At least there are no classes for us today as the seventh years are taking their mock NEWTs, and it's a free day for the rest of the school." Cassandra had been glad that she didn't have to do anything, and she hadn't been travelling as Harry had. "I've got nothing much to do as Brizel's already packed for me."

Harry couldn't believe his ears. "You got your house-elf to come from home to pack for you?"

Cassandra hadn't. "Faith sent him as she thought I might be busy having to cover for you."

Harry had the good grace to blush. "Sorry."

"So, seeing as we've got nothing to do, how about discussing some training with me?" Cassandra asked hopefully, now that Harry was looking a little perkier after taking the potion.

"You do know it's not going to be easy, don't you?" Harry wanted to make sure Cassandra knew exactly what she was letting herself in for. "I'm not exactly the most easygoing person when it comes down to things like training."

Cassandra looked cynically at Harry. "I think that you're just trying to get out of it, Harry. You're one of the nicest people I know."

Harry knew that Cassandra was basing her assessment on how he acted around her. "You wouldn't be saying that if you'd seen what I used to put the new recruits for the Auror program through every year."

“You can’t really have been that bad.” Cassandra wondered if Harry was teasing her.

“Have you finished breakfast?” Harry got up when Cassandra nodded. “Let’s go to the Room then, and you can judge for yourself.”

When they arrived, Harry wished for a pensieve, and withdrew a memory. “I’ll show you just a little of how a group of first years fared. This is about two years after I took over as Head Auror.”

Cassandra was quite excited to see what Harry had been like and eagerly plunged into the pensieve with him. She found herself in a large room with benches around the outside. “This looks like the training room at the Auror Academy.”

“It is.” Harry informed her. “Now watch.”

Cassandra watched as a group of eight young men and women entered the room.

A blond girl turned to the girl next to her. “So what do you think happens now?”

“I don’t know. My sister wouldn’t tell me.” Lynette Jacobs had been made more than a little nervous by Deborah’s refusal to tell her anything. “But I’ve got a feeling that it’s not good.”

A tall red-headed man snorted. “It’s our first day. They’re not exactly going to send us out into the field, or expect us to be able to do anything out of the ordinary. Your sister was probably just trying to scare you.”

David Grant, a short, stocky young man, disagreed with Richard Matthews’ statement. “My Dad said to grit my teeth, and just get on with it but like Jacobs’ sister, he refused to tell me anything else.”

“So who do you think we’ve got first?” Melanie Hoover, the blond girl who asked the first question, asked another one.

“As long as it’s not Lupin, I don’t care.” Grant told her.

Cassandra remembered that Lupin had been Harry’s last name prior to Sebastian, and she whispered to him. “Does he mean you?”

Harry grinned. “Oh yes, and you don’t have to whisper. They can’t hear you.”

“Is it true he’s supposed to have been a Death Eater?” Melanie asked nervously.

“Yes.” Lynette confirmed. “And he’s served time in Azkaban, to say nothing of the fact that he married You-Know-Who’s daughter.”

Melanie shivered. “Why would they let someone like that lead Auror Division?”

“Probably because he’s not afraid to get the job the done.” Elaine Goyle informed them. “I mean he disposed of You-Know-Who, so who else is going to stand in his way?”

“Aren’t you afraid of a former Death Eater?” Melanie thought the statuesque girl was rather offhand.

Elaine laughed a little contemptuously. “He’s hardly going to put us under the Cruciatus, now is he?”

Cassandra halted the memory as she saw the tiny smile playing around Harry’s lips. “That’s not part of the training is it?”

“Why don’t you ask one of the recruits who started this year?” Harry could see that Cassandra wasn’t sure if he was joking or not. “Better yet, let’s continue watching.”

Cassandra did as Harry asked, and she looked on with interest as a man with a ponytail and dark hair appeared suddenly, fabric fluttering as he pulled off his invisibility cloak. “That’s you, isn’t it?”

“Yep.” Harry had almost forgotten how he’d looked. “Now shh.”

Cassandra shut up.

Harry marched over to the corner and put down his cloak. "Would you like to repeat what you just said, Goyle?"

Elaine wasn't fazed by Harry's request. "I said that you'd hardly put us under the Cruciatus."

"And what makes you think that a former Death Eater and inmate of Azkaban wouldn't hesitate to do a thing like that?" Harry asked in a hard tone.

Lynette and Melanie both shifted uncomfortably as they realized that Harry had been listening to the entire conversation. Elaine stared scornfully at Harry. "You're Head of Auror Division. You'd be out of a job if you used an Unforgiveable on a trainee."

"Is that so?" Harry turned to Lynette. "Do you know why your sister didn't tell you what your first day would be like?"

"No, Sir." Lynette's voice shook as she answered Harry.

"You're going to find out." Harry turned his amber flecked eyes on Grant. "Sorry to disappoint you, Grant, but it looks as if your hopes of getting someone else to teach you have been dashed."

Grant swallowed hard and tried to look anywhere other than at Harry. Harry turned to Elaine. "Seeing as you volunteered your opinion so readily about what I'm not supposed to be doing, you're going first." Harry turned to the seven remaining recruits. "Sit down, listen, and learn."

The seven practically ran to the benches. Elaine cockily walked over to face Harry. "So what happens now?"

"That should be what happens now, Sir." Harry reproached her. "I'll let it slide this time, but in future should anyone forget the 'sir' when

they address me, they'll become the proud owner of a demerit. Ten demerits and you're out of the program."

Sitting on the benches, Melanie gasped. "But the program's three years long."

"And you've just earned your first demerit." Harry informed her. "So as Hoover has just pointed out to her detriment, the program is of three years' duration, so you'd better make sure you watch your mouths."

Cassandra stopped the memory again. "You're being awfully hard on them, Harry."

"It's going to get much worse for them, believe me." Harry informed her. "It can be a harsh world for an Auror, and the tougher they are the better." Harry then restarted the memory once more.

Harry turned to Goyle. "Draw your wand."

Elaine smoothly unholstered it from her wrist. "What now, Sir?"

Harry scowled at the derogatory tone that came with the word 'Sir'. "Just because you called me Sir, doesn't mean I won't punish you for insolence, Goyle. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes Sir." This time Elaine's voice held a mark of respect.

"Good." Harry unholstered his own wand. "If you can go twenty seconds with me in a duel, I'll let you forgo the Cruciatus curse."

Melanie and Lynette both paled at Harry's comment. Elaine, however, considered herself an excellent dueler. "I'm ready, Sir."

Harry waved his wand in the air and a misty clock appeared. "On my mark we'll bow and the duel will begin. From the second that the first spell is cast, the clock will begin to count down. If you get past twenty seconds a bell will sound, and all activity will then cease. Understood?"

“Yes Sir.” Elaine was determined to beat Harry.

Harry knew that Elaine had come top in dueling during the testing the trainees had been put through, but he also knew her weakness. “On three.”

As Harry said three, Elaine immediately erected a shield before throwing her first spell. “Confringo.”

Harry ducked as he cast his own spell. “Bellua Muris.”

A large, feral looking mouse appeared in front of Elaine, saliva dripping from its oversized incisors. Having a phobia about mice, and being faced with the largest one she’d ever seen, Elaine completely lost her head, screamed and dropped her wand in fear.

Harry accioed Elaine’s wand, before vanishing the mouse which was backing Elaine up. “Five seconds. Not bad.”

Cassandra found she’d dug her nails into her hand as she waited to see what Harry would do next.

Harry threw Elaine’s wand back to her, as he unholstered his own. “Are you ready, Goyle?”

Elaine looked a little fearfully at Harry. “You can’t be serious about the Cruciatus?”

“I am.” Harry assured her. “And that’s one demerit. So I suggest you grit your teeth as Grant’s father put it.”

Elaine gulped as Harry raised his wand. She hadn’t thought that Harry was serious. It turned out he was. Harry coldly incanted the spell. “Crucio.”

The other recruits and Cassandra recoiled as Elaine dropped to the floor and began screaming. Harry held the curse for fifteen seconds until a bell rang out, at which time Harry stopped. Elaine had

obviously bitten through her tongue as she had blood pouring from her mouth. Harry didn't seem bothered by this as he walked over and effortlessly lifted her to her feet, before helping her over to the bench, and pointing to a large container. "Take one of each potion." Leaving Elaine to deal with healing herself, Harry returned to the center of the floor. "So who can tell me why I just did that?"

No-one answered straight away, all afraid of drawing Harry's attention to them, until Denise Crawford, a small black girl, held up her hand, and asked hesitantly. "Because we need to know what it feels like?"

"Exactly. And because this is an exercise to do exactly that, and not a punishment, no-one's experience will last any longer than twenty seconds. During your classes, you'll learn more about how to deal with such an attack." Harry beckoned to Denise, who gulped as she got to her feet. "The same rules will apply as with Goyle, except you only need to last for fifteen seconds as you answered my question correctly." Harry turned to face the remaining recruits. "And that is the only question I'll be asking until this session finishes. The rest of you will have to last for the full twenty seconds."

Denise moved to the center of the floor with shaky legs. "I'm ready, Sir."

Harry knew that Denise didn't really have any phobias but her shielding rated as one of the worst in the group. "On my mark." As Harry suspected, Denise's shielding was quite poor, and, after exchanging one spell with Denise, he fired off a blasting spell which punched through Denise's shield with no difficulty, knocking the trainee to the floor. Harry then summoned her wand, ending the duel.

"You may as well stay on the floor. Seven seconds." Harry threw back her wand. "Grit those teeth, Crawford."

Denise cried unashamedly as Harry held the curse on her for eight seconds, before Harry dropped it, and then helped the girl up and over to the bench.

Cassandra observed in silence as the older Harry ploughed through the recruits one by one, with only Lynette Jacobs managing more than ten seconds, and even she went down at twelve. "You must have known their weaknesses."

"I did." Harry was pleased that Cassandra had realized how Harry had been able to deal so efficiently with each of the trainees. "But as you never know who you're going to face when you're out in the field, you've got to be able to overcome your weaknesses or face your fears. The person you're facing might just be holding the same information I was."

"Was that it for their first day?" Even though she knew it was just a memory, Cassandra felt nervous for the recruits.

"No." Harry shook his head. "They underwent the Imperius curse next."

"How did they fare?" Cassandra already knew that Harry was impervious to the curse, even though he said that it hadn't always been the case.

"Matthews had a lesson in civility." Harry couldn't help but smile as he remembered the shocked look on the trainee's face as he realized that Harry could easily shake off the spell. "I initially gave them the chance to put the curse on me. As Matthews was the worst at dueling, he had the pleasure of going first."

"He told you to do something really stupid, didn't he?" Cassandra just knew she was right.

"He did." Harry confirmed Cassandra's assumption. "He told me to get on my hands and knees and bark like a dog after I'd specifically told the trainees to only use innocuous commands."

Cassandra winced at the boy's lack of common sense. "You're not joking are you?"

Harry shook his head. "Needless to say Matthews found himself the proud owner of two demerits as well as being on cleaning duty for the next month as punishment for disobeying my orders. He also failed miserably when I put the Imperius curse on him, but then again I didn't expect anyone to do well."

Cassandra was curious. "What did you get him to do?"

"Nothing quite as degrading as he'd tried to do me." Usually Harry wouldn't have demeaned his students but he had been tough on them. However with Matthews, Harry had really wanted to teach the boy a lesson. "I just had him stand on one foot and hop around the room..."

"So you weren't that bad then." Cassandra thought Harry had been quite fair.

Harry finished off his sentence. "...while he told everyone that his childhood nickname had been Shrimp."

Cassandra winced. "I take it back. That was cruel."

"It still didn't teach the idiot. After I left the training room, I overheard him remark about my being a heartless Death Eater bastard who shouldn't be allowed to run a day camp let alone a training session for Aurors." Harry hadn't been entirely surprised by Matthews' comment but he had been pissed at his lack of discretion. "The trainees may have thought they knew everything about me, but none of them knew I was a werewolf, and Matthews hadn't expected me to be able to hear what he'd said. So I walked back into the room, and docked him another three demerits; one for not calling me Sir when he was talking about me, and two for insubordination."

Cassandra knew that Katherine would never let her live it down if she ever found out that she'd been spot on about what Harry had been like as Head Auror. Cassandra also knew that she couldn't have coped with Harry if he'd been like that with her at Hogwarts. "Did any of them drop out?"

“Surprisingly no.” Harry usually had had a drop-out rate of one or two. “But predictably Matthews didn’t make it through the first six months and was thrown off the course.”

“Who finished top?” Cassandra found it difficult to believe that this had taken place years earlier.

“Crawford did.” Harry smiled as he remembered the small woman. “She may have been tiny but she packed a punch. I was sorry to lose her when she got married and became pregnant. Her husband didn’t want her out in the field once they’d got a child, so she transferred to desk duty.”

“Did she like it?” Cassandra couldn’t help her interest in the group.

“No, she left after six months.” Harry had still kept in touch with her nevertheless. “You’d identify with her. She froze up on her first time out in the field, and as I said, she was a damn good Auror.”

Cassandra was well aware of Harry's belief that she could have overcome her fears. “She obviously had what it took. I know I don’t.”

“That’s a matter of opinion.” Harry thought that Cassandra could have gotten over her nerves with just a little encouragement but she’d refused to talk about it. He therefore changed the subject back to the reason he had brought Cassandra to the room. “So after seeing me in action, do you still want me to train you?”

“Would I have to undergo the Cruciatus?” Cassandra was terrified of having the curse used on her after seeing it demonstrated on both her Dad and the recruits.

“I’m training you how to defend yourself, not to be an Auror, so the answer is no.” Harry could sense Cassandra was frightened. “If at any point you want to know how it feels, and how best to deal with it, then I’ll do it but unlike the recruits, you have a choice.”

Cassandra suddenly remembered Harry’s comment a few months earlier about making changes to the Auror training program, and the

one he'd made when they first started watching his memory. "Did the recruits here have to go through it?"

"Yes." Harry had suggested the inclusion of both the Cruciatus and the Imperius curses to Sirius, who'd reluctantly agreed to it knowing that the trainees would be better prepared if they knew exactly how to deal with both curses, as well as how they felt. "The only difference is that Auror Moody was the one to carry this exercise out instead of me, but I believe I'm going to be doing it next year."

Cassandra shivered. "I'm glad I dropped out then."

"Let's forget about the Unforgiveables and focus on what you need. Like most magical beings, you might be slim but you're most definitely not in shape, so you need to exercise and get fit. And before you ask, yes, the recruits also have to do this." Harry aimed his wand at Cassandra, and frowned as she cringed. "Cass, I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to change your clothes into something more suitable."

"Sorry." Cassandra felt her face burning.

Harry knew what was wrong. "It's made you nervous after seeing that memory hasn't it?"

"Just a little." Cassandra admitted.

Harry put a hand on her shoulder. "If you noticed, I warned each and every recruit of what was going to happen. Unless it's a test, I'll always warn you if I'm going to do something you might find painful or uncomfortable."

Cassandra visibly relaxed. "Okay."

Harry transfigured Cassandra's clothing into a Muggle style sweat suit and sneakers. "You're ready. Now first..."

An hour later, Cassandra found herself lying on the floor, red-faced and sweating. "You're trying to kill me, aren't you?"

Harry passed her a bottle of water. "I told you that you were unfit."

Cassandra drank half the water before pouring the rest over her head. "I think I hate you."

"Now you know how the recruits felt about me." Harry pulled Cassandra to her feet. "Come on, you can use my shower and get freshened up before lunch. Unlike you, I haven't had all of my things packed away yet."

Cassandra groaned as she tried to walk. "My legs are made of jelly."

Harry knew how tough it was the first time. "Do you want me to carry you?"

"Yes." Cassandra said before remembering where they were. "On second thoughts, maybe not."

"Too late." Harry grabbed Cassandra and threw her over his shoulder in an approximation of a fireman's lift. "Palliatu."

Cassandra knew that Harry had made it so that unless someone looked really hard, they wouldn't be able to see her. "Why didn't you disillusion me?"

"I hate the feeling of the spell so I don't like using it on other people." Harry opened the door and carried Cassandra back to his room without incident. "You can take some of my sweat pants from the top drawer. Socks are in the bottom drawer and there should be a sweater that will fit you in the wardrobe."

After forty minutes and no sign of Cassandra, Harry began to get concerned and not being able to hear any noise, opened his bedroom door to find Cassandra in just her towel, curled up on his bed fast asleep. Harry grinned to himself, and covered her with a blanket before going off to shower.

It was almost two o'clock when Cassandra woke up to find a hand on her naked thigh. The last thing she'd remembered, she'd closed her eyes and promised herself just a few minutes. Looking down she realized that she'd got a blanket tangled around her legs and her towel was lying on the floor. Something hard was sticking in her back, and she became conscious that it was a book. Tugging at the blanket she pulled it up over herself. Harry, who'd fallen asleep beside her reading a book on Muggle myths, mumbled in his sleep and moved his hand to Cassandra's stomach, pulling her closer to him. Cassandra gently nudged him. "Harry, let go of me."

Harry didn't move. Cassandra spoke even louder. "Harry!"

Harry shot up, drawing his wand. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, I just wanted to free myself." Cassandra wrapped the blanket around herself more firmly. "Now could you get out while I get dressed?"

Harry yawned and rolled over, before closing his eyes. "Be my guest."

Cassandra gaped. "Harry, out."

"Use the bathroom." Harry closed his eyes and was asleep again within moments.

Cassandra huffily grabbed her towel, Harry's clothes, and the blanket before heading into the bathroom.

The Next Day

Harry found Cassandra once again sitting at his table eating a hurried breakfast. "You're in a rush, aren't you?"

Cassandra grimaced. "I'm on Express duty."

"I'll do it." Harry offered. "You've already gone above and beyond for me."

“You don’t mind?” Cassandra hadn’t been looking forward to it. “You were exhausted yesterday.”

“And today I’m fine, so slow down and eat your breakfast.” Harry poured himself some tea. “I’m just going to have this and I’ll go down.”

Cassandra ate some more toast before turning the conversation to the Christmas break. “So are you portkeying to Mione’s, or are you flying with us?”

“Flying.” Harry had done enough portkeying over the last two weeks to put him off for a long time. “I’m not turning down a chance for a little luxury.”

“Mione said in her last letter that the plane will leave on Christmas Eve at midday.” Cassandra reminded Harry as he shrank the trunk that was sitting on the floor by the door.

“I’ll be there.” Harry assured her. “So do you want your Christmas present now or on Christmas Day?”

Cassandra went red. “Christmas Day, I think.”

“Okay then.” Harry checked he’d got everything. “Make sure you ward the rooms when you leave.”

“I will.” Cassandra got up. “So, I’ll see you on Christmas Eve then.”

“You will.” Harry promised, his hand on the door handle.

Cassandra stood on her tiptoes and kissed his cheek. “Thank you for doing this for me.”

“It’s the least I can do.” Harry let go of the door handle and cupped Cassandra’s face with his hand, before dropping a very light kiss on her lips. “Watch how you go.”

Cassandra felt as if her stomach had bottomed out as Harry closed the door behind him.

December 22nd 2003

Mione sat opposite Remus in her office. "I'm sorry that I'm doing this just before Christmas but I really need to talk to you about my job."

Remus felt his heart plummet. "You're leaving?"

Mione shook her head. "No, but I've talked it through with Thomas and I'd like to cut back to three days."

Remus let out the breath he'd been holding. "I can live with that. I thought I was going to lose you completely."

"I'll stay full-time until we can find an assistant." Mione had already agreed to it with Thomas. "But once I've shown them the ropes, I really would like to spend more time with the children."

"I totally understand which is why I made the offer when you first got married." Remus stood up. "I'll get straight on to it when we return after the Christmas break."

Mione got up as well and kissed Remus on the cheek. "I appreciate it."

"I'd rather have you working for me part-time than not at all." Remus sighed. "You've been an absolute brick since Rupert was admitted to St. Mungo's and I don't know what I'd have done without your support. I just want you to know that I appreciate it."

"You're more than welcome." Mione opened the door to the office. "I've got a meeting, so I'll see you later."

Remus' smile fell off his face as Mione closed the door.

Christmas Eve

After clearing Customs, and taking the car that had been sent to shuttle the passengers out to where the aircraft was standing, Harry boarded and quickly found a seat near the back, the bedrooms in the middle effectively partitioning him off from everyone else. He'd flown quite a few times, usually when he'd been undercover as an Unspeakable and wanted to pass as a Muggle, and when he'd gone to Florida as a child with Anna, but never in such luxury before. Harry had been seated little more than a minute when Cassandra came bounding down the aisle and dropped into the seat next to him. "I didn't think you were going to make it. The attendant told me that you'd just got on."

Harry had almost resigned himself to portkeying. "Something cropped up at the last minute."

Cassandra buckled herself in. "So what have you been doing? H.J. said he's barely seen you."

"You can blame your Dad for that." Harry informed her. "He's had me helping out with the recruits while Alastor was taking some leave."

"Dad didn't say anything. Were you nasty to them?" Cassandra smiled up at the beautifully dressed girl who offered her champagne, which Cassandra refused.

"Not especially." Harry informed her. "I think there was at least one still left standing by the time I'd finished."

Cassandra cringed as she thought about the poor recruits. "So what did you do to them?"

Harry was unable to answer as the girl serving champagne, addressed Harry. "Champagne, Mr. Sebastian?"

"Thank you." Harry took two glasses and passed one to Cassandra. "Have a drink."

“I’m not sure if that’s a good idea. I get portkey sick.” Cassandra was a little embarrassed by admitting to her ailment. “So I’m a little worried about being airsick as well.”

Harry had already been forewarned by Katherine, and fished out a vial from his pocket. “Well you should have taken some of this then.”

Cassandra gratefully took the vial of anti-nausea potion. “So how did the Express trip go?”

Harry shrugged. “Boring. I slept for most of it.”

“You were supposed to patrol.” Cassandra rebuked him.

“H.J. did most of it.” Harry admitted, before attempting to divert Cassandra’s attention elsewhere. “So is Lucius on board?”

“A Muggle plane?” Cassandra snorted. “It would be below him. Anyway, Dad said Lucius and Regulus aren’t joining us until the 28th.”

Harry swallowed more of his champagne as the plane began to accelerate. “Normally I’d agree with Lucius but private flights are a different kettle of fish from commercial planes. You wouldn’t be treated like this unless you were travelling first class.”

“I didn’t think so.” Cassandra sipped her champagne, liking the feeling as the bubbles washed over her tongue. “And you didn’t answer my question about the recruits.”

“I was teaching them some basic hand to hand training.” Harry had found them all lacking.

“How did they do?” Despite the fact that she’d decided not to pursue the course, Cassandra was still inordinately interested.

“Pretty awful.” Harry patted his pocket. “I’ve actually something in my trunk for you relating to the program.”

Cassandra was confused as to why Harry would bring her something. "But I'm not training to be an Auror."

"I thought you might like to read the training manuals and related material." Harry could see that he was right as Cassandra's face took on an almost hungry expression. "It's what the trainees have to know before their periodic tests."

"If I work through them, will you test me?" Cassandra was well aware that even though she didn't want to be an Auror, possessing the same knowledge as they did could only be beneficial to her.

"I'm already ahead of you." Harry had had to ask Sirius' permission to let Cassandra see the material but when he'd explained why, Sirius had agreed. "Normally it takes three years for an Auror to cover this material but I'd say that you're far more intelligent than most of them, so I was thinking we could go through a year's worth every three months."

Cassandra's mouth fell open. "And I thought Orion was having a tough time of it. That's not very long."

"I need to complete this before you return to Hogwarts next September, as I won't be able to continue your training after that." Harry reminded her. "So are you game?"

Not one to turn down an academic challenge, Cassandra gleefully nodded. "You bet I am."

"So speaking of Orion, have you heard how he did in his mocks?" Harry put down his now empty champagne glass on the table in front of him, only for it vanish automatically.

"He finished sixth in the year." Cassandra was glad she hadn't forced Orion to help her. "Dad was really pleased with him, but said that he still expects better in his NEWTs."

“He won’t have Severus grading him then.” Harry reminded Cassandra. “So I think we might expect to see another Black finishing top of the pile.”

“We’ll have to see.” Cassandra gave a yelp as the plane bounced in the air current. “I’m not sure I like this.”

Further up the aircraft, Hermione was feeling exactly the same way and was clinging tightly to H.J. “Why didn’t I just portkey? I’ve never liked flying that much.”

“Because you know how much Cammie likes it.” H.J. grinned at his daughter who was beaming from ear to ear.

“It’s wonderful, Aunt Hermione.” Cammie preferred flying to portkeying. “It sort of reminds me of being on a broomstick.”

Hermione shivered. “And I don’t like the idea of you doing that either.”

H.J. shared a look with his daughter. “You should see her. She’s going to be flying circles around me soon.”

“I don’t think so, Dad.” Cammie knew that she’d be hard pushed to match H.J.’s talent. “But I do love flying. It helps me to forget about everything else when I’m up in the air.”

H.J. knew the feeling well. “Which is exactly what I like about it as well.”

Hermione gripped H.J. even tighter as the plane bounced again. “Can we talk about something other than flying?”

“Of course.” H.J. put his arm around Hermione, and the group began to discuss the changes H.J. was planning to the house he owned.

Sitting on the opposite side of the cabin, Sirius was talking quietly to his wife. “I’m sure there’s something going on between Harry and Cassie, even though they’ve both denied it.”

Faith, who was holding little Sirius, raised an eyebrow. "And that bothers you?"

"He's far too old for her." Sirius wasn't about to admit that he didn't like the idea of anyone dating his daughter, no matter what their age was.

"Sirius, the age gap isn't that much bigger than our own. And if you're so worried about it, then why have you bought Cassandra an apartment in Harry's block?" Faith asked.

"Because she's been making noises about getting somewhere of her own, and I'd rather she was living somewhere that is both safe and where someone is around to keep an eye on her." Sirius knew that Cassandra couldn't afford anything like he'd bought for her for her Christmas gift, and he didn't want his daughter living in an unsafe area. "And unlike Orion, I know she doesn't want to live in Grimmauld Place or the Square."

Faith had been shocked at the amount of money that Sirius had shelled out for the penthouse apartment. "You can't be that worried about Harry then."

"I am but my daughter's safety comes first." Sirius knew that he had to trust Cassandra when she said that she and Harry were nothing more than best friends. "But as much as I want to, I can't keep Cassie from dating, even if I disapprove of her choice. I still hope she'll meet someone closer to her own age, like Orion has."

"You're not still after Harry Potter and her getting together, are you?" Faith thought that Sirius had got lucky as it was with Orion and Katherine.

"Not after the stunt he pulled at the Yule Ball." Sirius had made Cassandra tell him the truth when she tried to brush off his enquiry as to how it had gone. Harry Potter had been lucky that he'd gone to Italy with his mother and her family as Sirius had been absolutely furious.

“I’m sure Cassandra can take of herself.” Faith had already spoken to Cassandra as well, and she knew that Harry Potter was going to be sorry he ever came up with the half-baked idea, as would his friends. “Anyway, I think that Harry Sebastian is a nice guy.”

Sirius liked Harry as well; it was hard not to. “I’m not saying he’s not but look at Tonks; she says she’s over him but it’s patently obvious that she’s not. I don’t want my daughter ending up the same way.”

“Sirius, they’ve both said they’re not involved, so stop worrying.” As the plane leveled out, Faith popped her sleeping son into the crib that was fastened to the sofa that ran along the wall of the plane. “If it turn out not to be the case, and he steps out of line, then kick his ass. Until then, I’d give them both the benefit of the doubt.”

Sirius backed down. “Okay, I’ll stop moaning.”

Two hours later, and with no sign of Cassandra returning, Sirius couldn’t help himself. “I’m just going to stretch my legs.”

Knowing exactly where her husband was going and why, Faith rolled her eyes and continued talking to Luna and Xander, who were sitting opposite her.

As Sirius reached the back of the plane, he found Harry holding Cassandra as she was being sick. “What’s wrong?”

Harry glanced up. “Airsick.”

“I have some anti-nausea potion.” Sirius offered.

“She’s already taken some.” Harry rubbed Cassandra’s back as she was sick yet again.

“I’ll be back shortly.” Sirius hated seeing anyone being sick, even his daughter, and he promptly fled.

Harry grinned. “So this Sirius doesn’t like people being ill any more than the other one did.”

Cassandra weakly lifted her head. "I don't care what Dad doesn't like. Just get me off this..." She didn't get a chance to say anything else as she was sick yet again.

Harry waited for the spasm to end before unbuckling his seatbelt, and getting up. "I'll be back in a minute." Harry hurried up to the front. "Sirius, I'm going to portkey Cassandra off the plane. I don't see any point in making her suffer when she doesn't have to."

"She's still being sick?" Sirius asked.

Harry nodded. "I just hope Thomas and Mione won't mind the intrusion."

Hermione glanced hopefully at Harry. "Do you want me to come with you?"

Harry could smell her fear, and knew that she was enjoying the flight about as much as Cassandra was. "Grab your things then." Harry then made his way to the back of the plane where a white-faced Cassandra was toweling her face off with a wet flannel the attendant had given her. "Can we please just go?"

"Let me grab my book." Harry picked up his bits and pieces. "Do you have your stuff?"

"It's up the front. Dad can bring it." Cassandra just wanted to get off the metal contraption.

Hermione appeared behind Harry. "I'm ready."

Harry unsnapped Cassandra's seatbelt and swung her into his arms. "Hold on tightly, Hermione."

Hermione grabbed hold of Harry's arm. "I'm ready."

Harry operated the portkey that they all had been given in case of emergencies, and activated it.

Thomas was sitting in his office when the wards alerted him to the fact that someone had portkeyed in. Making his way into the arrivals area, he found Harry and the two girls. "Is everything alright?"

"I'm sorry to barge in like this but Cassandra's been pretty ill, and it turns out that Hermione doesn't like flying." Harry informed him.

"It's not a problem." Thomas knew that not everyone did. "Follow me, and I'll show you to your rooms."

Harry was surprised when Thomas led them out of the corridor and to a bank of doors, where he opened the second one he came to. "We're staying in the main house?"

"Mione considers you her family, so yes." Thomas informed him. "This is Cassandra's room. Your room is two doors down to your left, and Miss Granger's is two doors beyond that. I'll just go and let Mione know you've arrived."

Cassandra groaned. "Harry."

Harry hoped the door he was rushing Cassandra through was the bathroom. Thankfully it was. As he held Cassandra as she was sick yet again, Hermione found a flannel, and as the attendant had, wet it before passing it to Harry. Once Cassandra had finished being sick, Harry wiped her face. "Hopefully that will be the last time."

Mione came rushing into the room, a vial of potion in her hand. "Take this, Cassandra. It's stronger than the usual stuff. I sometimes feel a little queasy when I fly so I brewed a derivative of the anti-nausea potion."

Cassandra shook her head. "Don't want anything."

"Trust me, it will help you." Mione knelt down by her friend. "And it tastes nice."

Cassandra reluctantly swallowed the potion, feeling her stomach try to rebel as she did so. "Ooh."

Harry rubbed her back. "Try and keep it down, Cass."

Cassandra kept swallowing until she could feel her stomach muscles relaxing. "That feels a little better."

Hermione passed over a glass of water. "Sip this."

Cassandra took a mouthful before rinsing it around her mouth and spitting it out into the toilet. "I need to brush my teeth."

Harry knew she was definitely feeling better then. "Let's get you up on your feet."

"Wow, my legs feel like jelly." Cassandra still felt a little shaky.

"I'll hold onto you." Harry promised as he wrapped his arm around her waist.

Mione and Hermione walked back into the bedroom. Hermione apologized for their arrival. "Sorry I came early but when Harry said that he was going to portkey Cassandra, I took the opportunity to hitch a ride."

"You don't like flying?" Mione led the way out to the verandah.

"Not particularly. H.J. told me to go if I hated it that much." Hermione felt a little guilty but she really had disliked the motion of the plane, even though it hadn't made her feel sick.

Mione threw up a silencing spell, as she wanted to question Hermione about something more worrying to her than flying. "Hermione, is Harry seeing Cassandra?"

"I don't know." Hermione was wondering the same thing. "This is the first time I've seen them together like this. Why?"

"I just wondered as he hadn't said anything." Mione dropped the spell.

Harry walked back into the bedroom and out to the verandah. "Do you have a robe Cass can put on? She's taking a shower."

Mione called out. "Tabernacle."

A small house-elf appeared. "Mistress Mione."

"There should be bathrobes in every bathroom. Can you make sure that that's the case? Before you do that, please sort one out for my guest, and take it into the bathroom for her." Mione instructed.

Tabernacle bowed and vanished. Harry smiled. "Thanks."

Mione decided to be blunt. "Harry, are you and Cassandra together?"

Harry was a little taken aback at the question. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I was wondering if the two of you would you like a room together." Mione enquired, as if this had been her intention all along.

"If I could have an adjoining room if you have one, that would be better." Harry knew he could listen out then if Cassandra needed him.

"I'll move Katherine down." Mione walked back into the bedroom and over to the wall, before waving her wand. "Novus Foris."

Harry watched as a new doorway appeared. "Thanks. If you'll both excuse me." Harry tapped on the bathroom door. "Cass, can I come in?" The two young women heard Cass call out it was okay to do so, and Harry disappeared inside.

Hermione turned to Mione. "Well, I guess that answers our question."

Mione glanced at the bathroom door. "I guess it does." She then turned to Hermione. "I'll show you to your room." With that the two women left.

In the bathroom, Cassandra was sitting wrapped in a towel. "Thanks for helping me. I feel a little silly but I couldn't bear it on that plane any longer. I'm just glad that I'm not a Muggle."

Harry pulled out his wand and dried Cassandra's hair for her. "We can go and sit outside once you put this bathrobe on."

Harry passed it to Cassandra before turning his back. "Mione's given me the room next door."

Cassandra dropped the towel before using a drying spell on herself. "Why would she do that? I thought you were two doors down."

"She thinks we're sleeping together." Harry said in an amused voice.

Cassandra slipped on the robe. "Please tell me you told her we weren't."

"I didn't because it's none of her business." Harry answered. "And besides, I think it's a good idea if I am next door, particularly given your nightmares."

Cassandra was still having the occasional nightmare about what she'd done at the Ministry. "Does this mean if I start screaming in the night, you're going to come running?"

"You know very well that I would." Between the incident at the Ministry and his travels with Sirius, Harry had made several trips from his own bedroom to the girls' suite; his hearing picking up Cassandra's screaming even from that distance. After three sleepless nights, and to spare Luna and Katherine, Harry had finally moved Cassandra into his bedroom for a few days, while he slept on the sofa with the door to the bedroom kept open. "I know only too well what it's like to have nightmares like that."

"You can turn around now." Cassandra picked up a hairbrush that had appeared. "Actually they seem to be getting better. During the time I slept in your rooms when you were gone, I only had three bad

nights, and I've had a couple over the last week, so they' re getting less frequent."

"I was a little concerned because of what we discussed about Thomas in the chamber." Harry was worried that it might play on Cassandra's mind. "Being here, I didn't want you to be alone."

"That's really sweet of you." Cassandra smiled at Harry. "Do you think there's anything to eat? I suddenly feel really hungry."

Harry had never known a girl eat as much as Cassandra did. "So the potion worked?"

"It did." Cassandra opened the door. "Ooh fruit."

Harry had seen the bowl of fruit on his way in. "There's also a bar over there. I'll get you some water and we can sit outside."

"Sounds good to me." Cassandra grabbed the bowl, Harry got the water and the two headed out for the balcony.

Christmas Day

Cassandra slipped out of her bed and picked up her robe. As the connecting door between their rooms was open, Cassandra crept around as quietly as she could, not wanting to wake Harry. After using the bathroom, she picked up a bottle of water and headed out onto the verandah where it was still dark. Shivering a little in the light breeze, she cast a warming spell on herself and made her way to lean against the balcony.

"Couldn't sleep?" Harry's voice came out of the darkness making Cassandra jump.

"Harry!" Cassandra could feel her heart racing. "You frightened me. What are you doing down there?"

"I went for a jog." Harry had woken up at six and, unable to sleep, had headed down to the beach.

“But it’s dark.” Cassandra pointed out.

“I can see perfectly well.” Harry knew he wouldn’t have to explain anymore than that.

“Are you coming back up?” Cassandra could now see him standing in Muggles shorts and a tee-shirt as she cast a lighting spell to illuminate the beach below her.

“Stand back.” Harry told her.

Cassandra watched in awe as Harry went back a short distance before breaking into a run and leaping into the air, his hand catching the top railing before hauling himself over. “I didn’t know you could do things like that.”

“Natural ability and being very fit helps.” Harry grabbed the towel he’d left on the chair outside of his room before sitting down and opening a bottle of water. “By the way, Merry Christmas.”

“I almost forgot.” Cassandra grinned. “Merry Christmas, Harry.”

“Do you want your presents now or later?” Harry hadn’t put them out with the others he’d brought with him.

Cassandra didn’t want to wait. “Now.” She turned round. “Let me just get yours. I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

Harry walked into his bedroom and hurried into the bathroom to shower. When he returned to the bedroom, he found Cassandra sitting on his bed a smile pile of gifts in front of her. “You look excited.”

“I’ve always loved Christmas.” Cassandra patted the bed next to her. “Come on, open your presents.”

Harry went into the closet and unshrank several large gifts before bringing them over to the bed. “You first.”

Cassandra didn't need telling twice, and picked up the largest box. "It doesn't feel very heavy."

"Just open it." Harry couldn't believe he actually felt a little nervous about whether Cassandra would like what he'd bought for her.

Cassandra pulled off the wrapping and opened the box before lifting the contents out. "It's so soft. I love it, thank you."

"I wasn't sure if I'd bought the right size. If it's not, let me know and we can exchange it." Harry had bought the leather jacket after seeing Cassandra eyeing it up when they'd gone to see a Muggle movie. "There's something in the pocket for you."

Cassandra dipped her hand in each of the pockets until she finally came across an envelope. Opening it she found a year's membership to a local cinema. "You're sending me to the cinema alone?"

Harry opened his drawer and pulled out his own membership. "I know we probably won't get to go much but I know you love watching movies on the big screen."

Cassandra looked more closely at the card. "I get a drink and free popcorn as well."

Harry couldn't help but laugh at her excited exclamation. "Only you would get most excited about the refreshments."

"I know what I like, and I like popcorn." Cassandra replaced the jacket into the box. "Thanks Harry. Now it's your turn to open one."

Harry picked up the smallest gift and was equally delighted with his basilisk skin wallet as Cassandra had been with her jacket. "I take it you got sick of hearing me moan about the state of the one I currently own."

"Just a little." Cassandra had bought the basilisk skin from H.J.

“Your turn again.” Harry passed over a very large box. “This one is quite boring but useful.”

Cassandra opened the box to find lots of sweat pants, tops and socks. “That’s brilliant. I don’t really have anything like this.”

“And if you keep nicking mine my socks, neither will I.” Harry teased.

Cassandra passed Harry’s second gift over. “Dad helped me with this one.”

Harry opened the long wide box to find wand blanks and several cores. “So he told you I snapped one of my wands, did he?”

Cassandra nodded. “He said you sat on it.”

A little embarrassed about the whole thing, Harry had hoped to keep it quiet. “It wasn’t perfect anyway. This will be much better as I can have it tailored to suit me.” Harry passed the final gift over.

Cassandra unwrapped it before grinning and pulling out the stuffed toy wolf Harry had bought for her. “It’s so cute, Harry.”

Harry’s face was an uncharacteristically red color. “Luna said that you loved hers.”

Cassandra hugged it to her. “I was really jealous when Xander bought her Lysander.”

“She called her wolf Lysander?” Harry hadn’t heard of the name before.

“It was after some character she’d read about in a Jilly Cooper book.” Cassandra explained before pushing Harry’s last gift over to him. “I’m afraid that this is the last one.”

Harry opened the square shaped parcel to find a first edition of one of his favorite books from his childhood, *The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe*. “Cassandra, you shouldn’t have.”

Cassandra copied Harry's actions from when he'd given her the earrings, and reached out to take it back. "Well, if you don't want it."

Harry laughed and ran a hand reverently over the book. "This means a lot. Thank you."

"You're more than welcome." Cassandra was delighted Harry liked it. "What time are you going to breakfast?"

"I can wait while you shower if you want me to." Harry offered.

"Come on then." Cassandra used her wand to vanish the wrapping paper before picking up her gifts.

Harry followed Cassandra into her room before sitting down on the bed as he waited for her to shower and change. When she came back into the room, he held out a box. "I almost forgot to give you this."

Cassandra opened the box. "Oh Merlin, Harry."

"I thought you might like a necklace to match your earrings. But it's not really a Christmas present. It's more to say thanks for covering for me once again." Harry had spotted it when he'd had a few spare hours when he and Sirius had been in New York at USAD, the US Auror Division.

"I really don't deserve this." Cassandra ran a finger along the single strand pink diamond necklace. "But instead of arguing like I did about the earrings, this time I'm simply going to say thank you, and say that I love it."

"I'm glad you like it." Harry watched Cassandra carefully place the box in her trunk. "So, are you ready to go down for breakfast now?"

"Can we just get something and come back here?" Cassandra could see the very first hint of the sun trying to come up, and she wanted to watch it.

“Give me a second.” Harry vanished, and returned a few minutes later with a tray laden with goodies. “The house elves were only too willing to help. If you want to hold open the door, then go ahead.”

Cassandra did as Harry asked, before sitting down and helping herself to a glass of orange juice. “I’m really hungry this morning.”

“I’m not surprised. You were rather ill yesterday, and you only really ate fruit.” Harry reminded her, as Cassandra had decided not to eat dinner. “For the return journey do you want to portkey, or do you want to take a chance with the potion that Mione gave you?”

“Portkey and I’ll take the potion as well.” Cassandra hated portkeying as well but she knew she’d rather do that than fly.

“We’ll do that then.” Harry promised. “Now eat up.”

“You never did say what the last minute thing that cropped up which delayed you.” Cassandra bit into the bacon sandwich she’d put together.

“After finishing with the trainees, I decided to drop by the apartment to pick up a couple of books I’d forgotten to pack. I found a note from Tonks asking to see me before I left if I had time.” Harry got straight to the point. “To cut a long story short, I went round to see her and she told me that she hasn’t got any lingering feelings of love for me, but that she wants a physical relationship again with no strings attached.”

Cassandra felt her stomach go over. “Isn’t that what you want with her?”

“I did.” Harry poured himself a cup of tea. “And I like Tonks; I really do. But I don’t think I should be going down that road again.”

“Have you told her that yet?” Her appetite gone, Cassandra put down the sandwich.

“Yes, but she’s asked me to at least consider it.” Harry sighed. “The sex with her was great but…” His voice trailed off as he sensed how uncomfortable Cassandra had become. “I really shouldn’t be discussing this with you.”

“Harry, I vent to you, and you vent to me.” Cassandra halfheartedly reminded him. “Are you still attracted to Tonks?”

Harry couldn’t deny that Tonks was attractive but the spark he’d once felt had gone. “Not really.”

“What changed?” Cassandra took a mouth of orange juice to wash down the last mouthful of bacon sandwich she’d taken, as it felt as if it had stuck in her throat.

“I’m attracted to someone else.” Harry admitted.

“Well that could be a problem then.” Cassandra felt even more miserable at Harry’s confession, but determined to be a good friend she encouraged him to go on. “So why don’t you get together with this other woman then?”

“Because she’s off limits.” Harry said simply.

Cassandra immediately jumped to the wrong conclusion. “You’re not still in love with Mione are you?”

Harry shook his head. “It’s not Mione, and the woman is not married.”

“Then why is she off limits?” Cassandra couldn’t see Harry’s problem.

“It doesn’t really matter why she is, she just is.” Harry’s response was clipped. “Can we change the subject?”

Cassandra felt a little hurt as Harry snapped at her, and her voice reflected it. “I thought we were going to be honest with each other.”

“Alright then.” Harry felt guilty at being so mean to Cassandra. “If you must know it’s because her father would kill me, and we have to work together.”

Cassandra frowned as she tried to work out who Harry meant. “I don’t know the people you work with when you’re at the Ministry. Can’t you just tell me who it is?”

Harry felt like banging his head against a brick wall. “Are you sure you were in Ravenclaw?”

Cassandra suddenly clicked. “You can’t mean me.”

Harry nodded. “I do but I’m not going to take it anywhere. You already know where I stand on love, and you deserve that. For me it would be just sex, and I’m not willing to risk both our friendship and working relationship for it.”

Disappointment filled Cassandra, even as she turned a fetching shade of crimson as she wondered what it would be like to sleep with Harry. “So we’re just going to have to stick to being best friends then.”

“Most definitely best friends.” Harry decided that he didn’t want to talk about it anymore. “Now, I think it’s time for a change of subject.”

Cassandra began to talk about Orion, but even as she did so, her mind was still on what Harry had said.

Next Chapter: H.J. learns Cammie is hiding something from him; Thomas makes a proposal; Harry makes a mistake.

Chapter 27: All Good Things...

December 27th 2003

Cammie sat dangling her feet into the swimming pool. As a shadow fell over her she looked up. "Hi, Uncle Thomas."

"Can I join you?" Thomas asked.

"If you want to." Cammie was delighted that Thomas was willing to sit with her; all of the other adults were up on the next level talking.

Thomas sat on a cushion, rolled up his trousers, and put his feet into the pool. "You don't seem very happy."

"I'm alright." Cammie splashed the water with her feet. "I really love it here, and I wish I didn't have to go back to school."

"All good things eventually have to come to an end." Thomas could see that something else though was bothering the girl. "But I can see it's more than just liking the Island. Cammie, what's wrong?"

Cammie glanced around, and up to the higher deck before shaking her head. "Nothing."

Thomas looked up to see that no-one could overhear them; Harry and Cassandra, the two closest adults to them, being too far away to hear what was being said. "You can tell me."

Unconsciously imitating Mione and Hermione, Cammie chewed her lip nervously. "Do you promise not to tell Dad or Aunt Hermione?"

"I promise." Thomas gave his word. "So what's wrong?"

"I hate Hogwarts." Cammie admitted. "I used to like it but the girls in my dormitory don't really speak to me anymore."

"Do you want to tell me why?" Thomas encouraged Cammie to go on.

“Because of Dad and Aunt Hermione.” Cammie sighed. “Jennifer Jones saw them out together at dinner just before we started back at school in September. She called Dad a...” Cammie’s voice trailed off.

Thomas had a fairly good idea of what the girl had said. “What did she call him? I won’t tell your Dad if it’s something you aren’t supposed to be saying.”

“She called him a Mudblood lover.” Cammie went bright red as she told Thomas. “Since then none of the girls have spoken to me.”

“Do they pick on you?” Thomas knew how hurtful children could be.

“They don’t hit me or anything like that.” Cammie didn’t want Thomas getting the wrong idea. “But they’ve hidden my books or knocked ink over my work. The only time I’m really happy now is when I’m flying.”

Thomas knew that Cammie was a good flyer who enjoyed the pastime. “Why haven’t you told your Dad?”

“Because I’m scared of what he’ll do, and that he’ll lose his job.” Cammie said in a quiet voice.

Thomas still felt that there was more to it than that, and toyed with the idea of using Legilimency on Cammie to find out what it was. “What makes you think he’ll do something that would make him lose his job?”

“Because of something I heard Dad say to Aunt Hermione. I didn’t mean to listen but I couldn’t help hearing him say that he’d hurt someone and he’d do it again.” Even though most of the adults had tried to keep H.J.’s past hidden, Cammie had once overheard H.J. telling Hermione that he didn’t regret hurting someone called Wormtail. Not wanting H.J. to know that she’d been eavesdropping, Cammie had kept quiet.

Thomas understood Cammie's reticence to tell H.J. "I think most people have hurt someone at some point in their lifetimes. Your Dad might have meant that he'd hurt someone's feelings, and not hurt them physically."

Cammie didn't think so, but didn't press the point. "But I still don't want to tell him."

"I think you should." Thomas knew that Cammie's problems would likely only get worse if she hid them from H.J. "H.J. can't do anything to help if you don't tell him."

Cammie revealed her greatest fear. "I'm frightened he'll stop seeing Aunt Hermione if I do."

Cammie was easy to read for Thomas. "That's what scares you the most isn't it?"

"Yes." A tear trickled down Cammie's cheek. "After what I went through with my birth parents, I just want parents who love me like everyone else has. And I really want Aunt Hermione to be my Mum."

Thomas put his arm around Cammie, who buried her face into his chest. "Everyone wants parents who love them. I know I did."

"But you've got really nice parents." Cammie liked Richard and Rebecca Seville immensely. "I bet they weren't mean to you."

"No, they've never been mean to me." Thomas answered truthfully, as since he'd met them Richard and Rebecca had been loving and kind to him. "But as a boy I didn't feel as if I had anyone to turn to. For me, a parental relationship has only been something I've grown to appreciate relatively recently."

"Were you lonely in school as well?" Cammie looked up at Thomas, her face stained with the few tears that had leaked out.

"Very much until I made..." Thomas hesitated as he searched for the right word... "the right associations as I grew older."

“Didn’t you like your brother?” Cammie had met Alex Seville and wasn’t very keen on him.

“I get on well enough with Alex.” While Thomas was genuinely fond of Richard and Rebecca, he couldn’t exactly say the same about Alex, even though he’d felt obliged to use Alex as his best man at his wedding.

“But you’re not best friends?” Cammie asked.

“No, we’re definitely not best friends.” Thomas smiled. “I used to have a best friend but he died some time ago.”

Cammie felt sad for Thomas. “I don’t really have one either.”

Thomas was aware that while she was at Hogwarts, Cammie was unlikely to ever have one. “Cammie, have you thought about changing schools? You do know that as long as you complete your magical education, you can attend a magical school anywhere, don’t you?”

Cammie nodded. “Yes, but I don’t speak French and I don’t want to go to Durmstrang.”

“How about the same school your Dad attended?” Thomas suggested. “Or I know of a very good school just outside of Sydney.”

Cammie leant back against Thomas. “I don’t want to go to Barstow. When I’ve asked about it, Dad said it’s a good school but a little strict, and he wouldn’t want me to have to go somewhere like that.”

“How about the other school I mentioned then? Berowra Academy is a very nice school.” Thomas had been round it several times as a representative of the Foundation, and his donor had attended it as a child. “My own children are already down to attend when they’re five.”

“Five?” Cammie pulled away and looked up at Thomas. “Isn’t that young to be learning magic?”

“They don’t learn much about magic until they’re older. They’ll be attending the school during the day as they learn to read and write but they won’t become boarders and start learning magic until they’re twelve.” Thomas explained. He’d intended to have his children tutored before enrolling them at Hogwarts. But Mione, not liking a lot of the teachers and their policies there, had balked, and not wanting to upset his wife, Thomas had reluctantly agreed to send them to Berowra until they were older. He had, however, said that he wanted to look at other schools once they reached ten before deciding on their final destination. However, he didn’t share this with Cammie.

“Do Muggleborns go there?” Cammie didn’t want to consider moving schools if the same problem existed at Berowra.

“They do.” Thomas allayed Cammie’s fears.

“Do you think Dad would let me go?” Cammie really didn’t want to return to Hogwarts.

“The only way you’ll find out is if you tell him what’s going on.” Thomas said softly. “I’ll come with you, if you don’t want to tell him alone.”

Cammie sagged with relief as she realized she wouldn’t have to do it alone, and she wrapped her arms tightly around Thomas. “I love you, Uncle Thomas.”

“I love you too, Cammie.” Thomas returned the girl’s hug. “Now you’ve got that off your chest, why don’t you take a swim while I watch you. Then we can go and tell your Dad.”

“Okay.” Feeling much happier, Cammie pulled off her dress to reveal her bathing suit beneath, before jumping into the water.

Up on the next level balcony, Harry pushed away from the railing. “Cass, I need to go and speak to H.J. I’ll be back shortly.”

Cassandra had been hoping to go for a walk on the beach with Harry but smiled anyway. "No problem. I'll still be here when you get back."

Harry walked over to H.J. "I need to talk to you."

H.J. followed Harry back into the house and down to his room. "What's wrong?"

"I've just overheard a conversation between Cammie and Thomas." Harry revealed. "I shouldn't really be telling you but I think you should be forewarned."

H.J. frowned. "Did he threaten her?"

"Quite the contrary." Harry then told H.J. what he'd overheard.

H.J. sank onto the bed. "I'm supposed to be protecting her, and instead she's trying to protect me. What kind of a parent am I that my own daughter is too afraid to tell me what's bothering her?"

"You're a good parent, H.J." Harry sat down beside him. "But Cammie's frightened of losing the stability you've given her, and she's just as frightened of losing Hermione as well."

"There's not much chance of that." H.J. went to his trunk and opened it up, pulling out a small box and throwing it to Harry.

Harry opened it to reveal a diamond solitaire ring. "You're proposing?"

"I was going to." H.J. had intended to ask Hermione on New Year's Eve. "Now, I'm not sure if it's such a good idea."

"I didn't realize that you and Hermione were even sleeping together, let alone that things had gotten this serious." Harry passed the box back.

“Don’t take this the wrong way, Harry but I’m not you.” H.J. replaced the box in his trunk. “Hermione and I haven’t slept together yet. I know that Hermione believes in being married before she takes that kind of step and I respect that. I love her, Harry, and as much as I’d like to sleep with her now, I’m going to wait until then.”

Harry wasn’t upset by H.J.’s comment. “H.J. you haven’t offended me. I know exactly what I was like before I married Seville.”

“You’re still like it now, Harry.” H.J. reminded him of his last entanglement. “Look at what happened with Tonks.”

“H.J., I wasn’t the only consenting adult in that relationship. Tonks also didn’t want more than sex when we started seeing each other. It’s not my fault that that changed.” Harry decided to share Tonks’ latest request with H.J. “I may as well tell you that Tonks has told me that she wants to pick up where she left off; that she’s over me and simply wants a sexual relationship again.”

“Are you mad?” H.J. couldn’t believe that Harry was considering it. “You know very well that she isn’t over you as much as she’s trying to convince herself otherwise. Please tell me you’re not seriously considering it.”

“I’m not.” Harry ran a hand through his hair. “Besides I like someone else.”

H.J. recognized the gesture as one Harry used when he was feeling guilty or stressed. “Who is it, Harry? It’s not Mione again, is it?”

“No, it’s not. It’s Cass.” Harry could see that H.J. was even less happy about that news. “Before you say anything, Cass and I have already discussed it, and she knows that I’m not willing to risk our friendship for a sexual relationship with her.”

H.J. let out the breath he’d been holding. “I’m glad to hear it. Don’t get me wrong. I want you to be happy, Harry but getting involved with Cassandra would be like playing with fire, and she’s not Tonks. If you messed her around like that, she’d be devastated.”

“Which is why we’re sticking to being best friends.” Harry assured H.J. “Getting back to Cammie and Hermione. I think you should still ask Hermione to marry you as I don’t think anything will change what’s going on at Hogwarts. Not unless you come out and call Hermione a Mudblood in front of Cammie’s friends and say that you’ve finished with her.”

“And that’s not going to happen.” H.J. retorted. “What do you think about Thomas’ idea of Berowra?”

“I think you should consider it.” Harry suggested. “I know it’s a long way from England, but after meeting Rebecca Seville I think that she’d be willing to act as contact in Sydney for Cammie.”

H.J. didn’t want his daughter moving clear across the world but he also didn’t want her exposed to any more bullying. “I’ll talk to Cammie when we’ve finished talking.”

Harry shook his head. “Don’t. Let Cammie come to you. If she thinks that Thomas has betrayed her trust and gone behind her back, she’ll be upset.”

H.J. appreciated that Harry had a good point. “It’s going to be hard sending my daughter halfway around the world.”

“If it makes her happier, then I’d consider it.” Harry knew he’d have done the same for his daughters. “So are you planning to move Hermione into Hogwarts once you’re married?”

H.J. shook his head. “She’d hate it. I’m probably going to offend you again, but I told Luna my plans last night.”

Harry was a little hurt but believed that H.J. must have had a good reason to tell Luna first. “It’s okay, H.J. Why?”

“If you remember, Darcy Cottage is owned by Luna’s mother and Uncle Grim. It’s going to be Luna’s home after she marries but until then it’s free. Luna has said that she believes her mother will rent it

out to Hermione during term time.” H.J. had asked Luna to approach Lavinia to check if she didn’t mind. “It would be ideal. Hermione would be close enough for me to live outside the school for part of the week when I’m not on dormitory duty, and it’s far away enough from Hogwarts that Hermione won’t be exposed to the prejudices there.”

Harry remembered the Cottage well. “You’ll love it there. It’s very nice. But Hermione hasn’t said yes yet.”

“I’m well aware of that.” H.J. sank down onto the bed. “And I’m a little worried she’ll say no if Cammie doesn’t move. She loves Cammie, and won’t do anything that would hurt her.”

“In that case, you need to explain things to Hermione, including bringing that marriage proposal forward.” Harry suggested.

“I was hoping for something a little romantic than ‘my daughter’s being bullied at school because of you, and, hey, would you like to get married?’” H.J. responded a little sarcastically. “I think I’m going to deal with Cammie, and then make a decision about Hermione.”

“If you need someone to talk to, I’m always here.” Harry offered.

“Just you remember the door swings both ways.” H.J. got up off the bed. “I’m always here if you need someone as well.”

“I know.” Harry got up as well. “Don’t forget. Look surprised when Cammie tells you.”

“Speak of the devil.” H.J. looked up the corridor to see Cammie and Thomas coming his way. “I’ll talk to you later.”

Harry walked off, leaving H.J. to deal with his daughter.

Three Days Later

Luna glanced up as H.J. walked out onto the verandah. “How did the trip go?”

“The school is wonderful.” H.J. had been impressed by the facilities there.

“What does Cammie think of it?” Luna hoped that the young girl had liked it.

“She starts on January 26th.” H.J. had discovered that the Australian term started in January at Berowra. “And she’ll be there until she’s eighteen. She’ll be sharing a bedroom with two other girls rather than being in a large dormitory. There are houses but they select them by going through the alphabet and allocating them that way. There’s no picking by characteristics.”

“And what does Hermione think of all this?” Xander enquired.

H.J.’s grin got even bigger. “She’s on board with the idea. And I proposed last night, and she said yes.”

Xander got to his feet and shook hands with H.J. “I’m really pleased for you both. So when’s the big day?”

“July 17th.” H.J. had let Hermione pick the date. “Thomas’ parents have offered to let us get married at their place as Mione and Thomas did. Cammie will be on a break then, and Thomas and Mione have agreed to take Cammie for the week she’s off from school so that we can go on our honeymoon.”

A smiling Hermione and Cammie came out onto the verandah. “I can see you’ve told them.”

Luna got up. “Can I look at the ring?”

Hermione held out her hand. “I feel so lucky.”

“I’m the lucky one.” H.J. put his arm around his fiancée and daughter. “I have the best ladies in the world.”

Xander shook his head. “I’m going to have to disagree. My little Twinkie is hard to beat.”

Luna blushed as Xander pulled her back down to sit with him. "That's really sweet."

"Not as sweet as you." Xander kissed Luna making Cammie pull a face.

She turned to her Dad. "Can I go swim?"

"I'll get changed and come with you." Hermione offered.

H.J. looked round. "Where's everyone else?"

"Sirius and Faith are taking a nap." Xander grinned, leaving H.J. in no doubt as to what 'taking a nap' insinuated. "The new arrivals are in the billiards room except for Lavinia, James and Remus, who are in Thomas' library."

"And the rest of our lot?" H.J. wondered more where his brother and Cassandra were.

"Katherine and Orion went that way up the beach." Luna pointed east. "And Cassandra dragged a very reluctant Harry to look at the tide pools that way."

H.J. wanted to share his news with Harry. "I'll be back later then. I want to tell Harry, Hermione."

"Off you go then." Hermione knew that despite the fact the two weren't truly brothers, they considered themselves that way. "Come on, Cammie, let's go get our costumes on."

H.J. waited until Hermione had left before addressing Luna. "Did you speak to your mother?"

"Mummy said that you can rent the cottage for at least twelve months." Luna informed H.J. "Now go find Harry before you burst."

H.J. headed down to the beach.

A short time earlier

Harry scowled as Cassandra blocked his light. "Can't you see I'm trying to read?"

"Don't be so boring." Cassandra grabbed Harry's hand. "Come for a walk with me. I want to see the tide pools that Thomas mentioned."

Harry put his book aside. "Will you leave me alone if I refuse?"

"No." Cassandra tugged more insistently. "Now come on."

Harry got to his feet and slipped on his footwear before following Cassandra down the steps to the beach. "I thought H.J. would have been back by now."

Cassandra knew that Harry was worried. "I bet everything has worked out fine for him and Cammie."

Harry still felt guilty about Cammie. "I feel terrible that I didn't spot anything was wrong in class."

"You shouldn't feel guilty." Cassandra didn't need Harry's senses to know what was bothering her friend. "I noticed but let it go when Cammie told me that she was just tired. If anyone should have done something it was me."

Harry thought Cassandra was being too hard on herself. "You couldn't have known. No-one thought anything was wrong until Cammie opened up."

Cassandra stopped walking to pick up a shell she liked the look of. "Who'd have thought that Thomas would be the one she'd turn to? It kind of makes Luna's lingering worries about him being Voldemort a little moot, doesn't it?"

Harry hesitated before responding. "I'd say yes, but I've still got a tiny niggle about how much pain I'm in when I'm near him. If I knew why, then I could totally rule him out but..."

"Come on, Harry." Cassandra interrupted Harry as she started walking again. "He's not shown any signs of being an evil bringer of doom, and you have to admit, he treats Mione and the children spectacularly well. And given what he's doing for Cammie, you have to admit that it's pretty unlikely he is Voldemort."

"I know all that." Harry accepted that everything Cassandra was saying was true. "But I can't just completely quash my concerns. I mean look at who's he got as houseguests, Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy amongst others."

"Harry, he's also got Bill Weasley, and Uncle Regulus and his family staying." Cassandra argued. "So unless you still think Bill Weasley's a Death Eater and had something to do with the attack on Dad after all, then Thomas can't be Voldemort. And Dad said that Uncle Regulus doesn't have a Dark Mark."

"No, I don't think Bill is a Death Eater." Harry didn't want to mar his time away from Hogwarts by thinking about Voldemort or anyone else for that matter, so he decided to end the topic of conversation, and grinned at Cassandra. "Well now that you've declared that Thomas can't be Voldemort, my job here is done, and I can go home. Sirius doesn't need me now." Harry went to turn around.

"No, you can't." Cassandra grabbed Harry's arm. "It doesn't matter what I think. You know very well Dad won't let you go." Cassandra then let go of Harry's arm and put into practice some of the acting she'd seen in the movies she'd been watching. "Besides, you wouldn't leave a poor single girl alone to fight off the advances of the evil Alex Seville, would you?"

Harry burst out laughing as Cassandra placed one hand on her forehead and the other on her heart as if she was terrified, her mouth opened a little as if she was going to scream. "You do know you watch too many movies don't you?"

“Just a little.” Cassandra waded into the water. “Come on, Harry. Loosen up. In England it’s cold and wet. Here we can enjoy the sunshine. We’ve got a party to look forward to tomorrow, and we’re with our friends and family.”

Harry watched Cassandra running about. “I sometimes forget how young you are.”

“It’s better than being an old fuddy duddy like you.” Cassandra kicked water over Harry.

“I’ll show you old fuddy duddy.” Harry ran into the water making Cassandra scream in delight as she attempted to run from Harry.

Harry easily outpaced her, and picked her up before walking deeper into the water. “Now who’s an old fuddy duddy?”

“Harry Sebastian! Don’t you dare.” Cassandra grabbed onto Harry’s shirt.

“Wrong thing to say Cass.” Harry promptly released her.

Cassandra rose up out of the ocean, water streaming down her face. “I’ll get you back for that.”

Harry just laughed as Cassandra chased after him, totally unable to catch him. After a short time she flopped down on the beach. “I’m tired.”

Harry dropped down beside her. “So who’s old now?”

“You are.” Cassandra hid her smile as she slowly unholstered her wand, only for Harry to lean over her and grab her hand, before removing her wand from the holster and dropping it on the sand.

Harry smirked. “You’ve got to be quicker than that to outsmart me.”

“Oh, but I am.” Cassandra replied as she pulled out her spare wand.

Harry grabbed that as well, pinning Cassandra's other hand to the sand. "Nice try, Black."

Cassandra wriggled, trying to get free of Harry as he lay over her. "You should at least give me a sporting chance."

"I don't play fair." Harry all at once became aware of how close Cassandra was as she moved against him.

"That's because you're a spoil..." Cassandra's words were cut off as Harry closed the distance between them and kissed her.

As Harry's lips covered hers, Cassandra found her arms being released. She subsequently wrapped them around Harry neck as she opened her mouth to him. As their kisses began to get more heated, Cassandra moved one of her hands so that she could grab Harry's shirt as she tried to pull him closer. In response, Harry rolled them over so that Cassandra was lying on top of him allowing him to yank her wet blouse free from the waistband of her skirt. Cassandra felt a shiver go run through her as Harry explored her back.

In response, Cassandra pulled Harry's shirt open, the buttons popping off it, before placing her hands on his chest. Harry reciprocated by repeating the deed on her blouse, to reveal that she wasn't wearing a bra. Cassandra moaned as Harry's chest hairs rubbed against the soft skin of her breasts as he pulled her back down onto him. Harry then returned his hand to her hair to hold her head steady as their kisses grew even more passionate.

A polite cough interrupted the pair. Harry and Cassandra both turned their heads to see a somewhat annoyed H.J. standing a short distance from them. "Harry, I was told you were down here. I didn't quite expect to come across you like this though, so I'll leave you two alone." H.J. turned and walked back the way he came.

Harry pulled Cassandra's blouse together, and in one swift motion lifted her to her feet as he got up. "I'm so sorry, Cassandra. I don't

know what came over me. I completely forgot where I was and who it was I was kissing.”

Feeling rejected, Cassandra felt tears come to her eyes. “It’s okay, Harry. It doesn’t matter.”

Harry could have kicked himself as he realized she’d misunderstood what he meant. “It does matter, Cass.”

“I’m going back to the house.” Cassandra went to walk off, only for Harry to grab her arm.

“I hate upsetting you like this.” Harry pulled Cassandra into his arms. “This is why we can only be friends, Cass. I really shouldn’t have kissed you.”

“Then why did you?” Cassandra asked bluntly.

“Because you looked so adorable with your hair all wet, and a mischievous look on your face.” Harry cupped Cassandra’s face. “And right now there’s nothing more I’d like to do than kiss you again but it wouldn’t be right.”

Cassandra could feel her face burning as she responded to Harry. “But I wanted you to kiss me.”

Harry resisted the temptation to do it again. “Cass, you’d have never ended up kissing me if I hadn’t made the first move, now would you?”

Answering honestly, Cassandra shook her head. “But that doesn’t mean to say that I wouldn’t have wanted to.”

“It doesn’t change the fact that it’s my fault.” Harry ran a hand through his hair. “Cass, you’re my boss’ daughter; someone I’ve told that I’m not involved with you. But when I kissed you, I totally forgot about that, and the fact that we were in the middle of the beach where anyone could have come along. Do you realize what would have happened if H.J. hadn’t turned up?”

Cassandra couldn't look at Harry as she nodded. "I think so."

Harry led Cassandra over to a large rock and sat her down. "Cass. I know you've probably heard this before but your first time should be special, and not a tumble in the middle of a beach with someone like me. I don't want to hurt you, and getting involved with you would end with me doing exactly that. I care too much about you to do that to you."

Cassandra wanted to argue that it would have been special with Harry, and that she would have happily gotten involved with Harry but she knew that that wasn't what he wanted to hear. "Harry, it's okay. I understand what you're trying to tell me. Why don't we chalk this down to one of those horrible moments we'd both like to forget?"

Harry felt a little hurt by Cassandra's comment but knew he only had himself to blame. "Again, I'm sorry, Cass."

"Let's just forget about it. I'm alright now." Cassandra smiled tightly. "Except for the fact that I'm horribly embarrassed about being caught by H.J."

Harry used his wand to repair both his and Cassandra's clothing. "I just hope he doesn't say anything to anyone else, not that I think he will."

Cassandra hadn't thought about that, and she groaned. "Oh Merlin. If Dad finds out, he'll kill me."

"I don't think it would be you he'd be killing." Harry correctly pointed out, as he held out his hand. "Come on. We can talk about what an idiot I am as we walk back."

Wanting everything to be alright between them, Cassandra took Harry's hand and together they returned towards the house.

As Harry expected, H.J. was waiting for him. "I'm coming."

H.J. closed the bedroom door behind him once Harry had followed him in. "What happened to 'we're just going to be friends'?"

"We are." Harry knew how lame he sounded. "I know it doesn't look like that after what you just saw but I mean it this time. Cassandra just wants to chalk it down to something she'd rather forget."

"Perhaps it might be an idea to put some distance between you and her." H.J. suggested.

"That's going to be difficult as I still have classes to teach with her but I'll be pretty much gone from Hogwarts as from June." Harry revealed.

"Why are you going to be gone from Hogwarts as from June?" H.J. latched onto the second part of Harry's statement.

Harry filled him in on what Sirius had revealed. "Bella's pregnant, so Sirius has offered me her job."

H.J. was thrilled for Harry. "Talk about picking up where you left off."

"Not quite. Sirius still holds that top spot." Harry reminded him. "But I have to admit it's going to be good to get back in the saddle."

"What does Cassandra think about it?" H.J. knew that Harry's leaving early would affect Cassandra.

"I'm still going to cover the sixth and seventh year classes so that Cass isn't inundated but she's also leaving Hogwarts at the end of the school year." Harry revealed. "As much as she likes teaching, it's not really for her."

H.J. wasn't entirely surprised. "So what is she going to do instead?"

"Work for me and Sirius." Harry had been delighted that Cassandra had agreed when Sirius offered her an assistant's job as the paperwork was beginning to get ridiculous. "Which means that in addition to teaching, I'm also going to have to spend a lot of time with

her training her. Sirius wants her to be able to defend herself even though she isn't an Auror, seeing as the department we work in isn't exactly the safest."

H.J. groaned. "So much for putting some distance between the two of you."

"I think Sirius' presence will be enough to prevent anything from happening at work." Harry reminded H.J. "And you're forgetting something else when it comes to avoiding Cassandra."

H.J. frowned. "Such as?"

"She'll be living in the same apartment building as me." Harry reminded H.J. of Sirius' Christmas gift to his daughter. "So I can't exactly avoid her."

"In that case, you need to demonstrate some of the maturity you're supposed to possess, Harry, and show a little restraint." H.J. berated Harry. "Cassandra is a lot younger than you. She might not know better but you do."

Harry felt as if he was ten years old again. "Now you've dressed me down, and I've accepted that you're right, do you want to tell me what you were doing on the beach?"

H.J. had forgotten his original purpose of seeking Harry out. "Hermione and I are getting married in July, and Cammie is starting Berowra at the end of January."

"Congratulations." Harry hugged H.J. "Is Hermione going to watch over Cammie until she goes?"

H.J. nodded. "She is. We're going to take her over the weekend before school starts, and settle her in. But it's your weekend off, so I was wondering if you'd swap with me."

"Of course I will." Harry was glad to shift the spotlight onto H.J. "If you need anything else let me know."

“Harry, before we go, what does James think of all this?” H.J. wondered how James was going to deal with three empty positions as Katherine would also be leaving as her marriage to Orion had also been planned for the end of the school year.

“James knows about us.” Harry had told him with Sirius’ help. “I had to tell him in order to explain why I was leaving, but he won’t be mentioning it to Minerva.”

“I don’t see why he would as Minerva’s little more than a figurehead anymore.” Minerva had been taken ill several months earlier and was struggling to recover. James had taken over most of the day to day concerns with the school. “It will be a miracle if she returns at all.”

“I pity James if she doesn’t.” Harry wouldn’t have wanted to be in the man’s shoes. “He’ll have to find a new deputy head, and I’m willing to bet he won’t choose Lily or Severus.”

“You can hardly blame him.” H.J. knew that there was no love lost between the group as did everyone else. “If it happens, my money is on Pomona.”

“I disagree.” Harry was of the opinion that Pomona was more than a little biased towards her own house when it came down to the pupils. “I think he’ll pick Aurora even though she’s not a Head of House.”

“Fifty galleons?” H.J. grinned at Harry.

“Done.” Harry shook H.J.’s hand. “And if we’re both wrong, it goes towards Cammie’s spending allowance.”

“I’m not going to argue with that.” H.J. went to open the door, and hesitated. “About Cassandra, Harry; I’m not trying to preach to you, and I do want you to be happy. But find someone who will be able to deal with the emotional fallout if things go wrong.”

Harry knew that H.J.'s earlier anger with him stemmed from concern for both him and Cassandra. "I will."

The two men then left the room and rejoined the others.

Thomas' Study

"I apologize I wasn't here to meet you when you arrived but something came up that needed dealing with." Thomas handed over a glass of scotch to Bill, and got straight to the heart of the matter. "So have you tracked down the Fourth Pillar?"

Bill nodded. "As Atropos suggested, the Cartouches are in the wizarding section of the Egyptian Museum, and they're known as the Cassus Cartouches. However, due to their age, they're heavily guarded and warded."

"Are visitors allowed to view them?" Thomas questioned.

"They are." Bill confirmed. "Thinking of checking it out?"

"I am." Thomas had never visited Cairo before. "I think I'll take Mione with me."

"Is it wise trusting her?" Bill enquired.

"Mione is probably one of the most intelligent people I know." Thomas was aware that his wife was as clever as he was, if not more so. "Her insights may well prove invaluable. So yes, I consider it a good move to trust my wife."

"But you don't trust her enough to tell her that you're Dominus." Bill pointed out.

"It has nothing to do with trust." Thomas wasn't about to share his feelings as he had with Regulus. "Putting my wife aside, how are things working out for you?"

“It’s strange to look in the mirror and see a stranger.” Bill ran a hand over his face. “But the thrill of being able to perform magic is beyond anything I could have imagined.”

Thomas smirked. “Wait until you cast your first killing curse. The feeling is almost exquisite. But it does take practice to be able to do it at a drop of a hat.”

“I have Bill’s memory of performing the curse on animals while he’s been ward breaking but not really the sensation of how it feels.” ‘Bill’ told Thomas.

“Then I think it’s time you got to try it out for real.” Thomas sat down. “I’m going to be continuing my search for the Clavis at the French Ministry.”

“Regulus hasn’t been able to find anything out from his brother?” ‘Bill’ enquired.

“Not a thing.” Thomas hadn’t expected him to but he’d still wanted to cover all the bases. “So I’m going to be paying a visit to your stepfather.”

‘Bill’ shrugged. “Henri means nothing to me.”

“I’m glad to hear it.” Thomas threw a portkey over to the redhead. “Because if he doesn’t give me what I want, you’ll be leading his interrogation.”

“I would have thought you’d be doing that.” ‘Bill’ picked up the portkey.

“I’ll be there.” Thomas informed him. “I’m going to get quite a kick out of you telling Henri who you really are.”

“Not as much as a kick as when I finally get to tell Remus.” ‘Bill’ was quite gleeful about the opportunity.

“You really don’t like your brother, do you?” Thomas deduced.

“Not at all.” ‘Bill’ now sounded bitter. “Everything was handed to him on a platter. Even though Dad treated me well, it was always about Remus. Dad bent over backwards to accommodate him after he was bitten, and I always felt pushed aside. Then when I didn’t get a letter to Hogwarts, and Remus eventually did, it was as if my world had ended. Dad was sympathetic but I always felt as if I’d disappointed him.”

“So you became a Watcher.” Thomas stated rather than asked.

“First of all I rebelled, and dabbled in things I shouldn’t have.” ‘Bill’ told him. “It was only later that I finally gave into my so-called destiny and became a Watcher. Even then, Remus still had to get one over on me. He completed his Watcher training and then dropped out to become a teacher of all things. I couldn’t believe it when Dad died and the job as head of the Council was offered to Remus. It should have been mine.”

“But you did get the prime job of being Watcher to the Slayer, Rupert.” Thomas pointed out.

“Who did nothing but rebel against me at first.” Rupert softened his voice. “But Buffy has a way of getting under your skin, and my only regret in assuming this identity is that I can’t tell her.”

Thomas was now able to ask Rupert the same thing Rupert had asked him. “Don’t you trust her enough to tell her who you really are?”

“I trust her but she’d never understand.” Rupert admitted. “So for now, I’ll have to keep quiet.”

“Have you considered marrying her?” Thomas suggested.

A look of distaste crossed Rupert’s face. “Buffy is like a daughter to me.”

“My apologies.” Thomas thought about Rupert’s fiancée. “What’s happened about Anna?”

“She visits St Mungo’s religiously as does Buffy.” Rupert had a feeling that Thomas already knew this. “I’ve thought about pursuing her but as Bill is almost half her age, I don’t think it’s quite appropriate.”

“Thank you for the information, Rupert.” Thomas indicated that their meeting was now at an end. “I’ll let you know when I’m ready to make a move on the French Ministry. It won’t be for a while as their security is still quite tight as a result of my attack on Sirius.”

“I’ll be ready.” Rupert stood up. “I’ll be in touch if I find out anything more out about the two remaining Pillars, seeing as you’ve already located the first one yourself.”

“Please do.” As Rupert left, Thomas poured himself another scotch, and contemplated Rupert Giles.

Thomas had found Rupert easy to prey on as he’d searched his mind to find out what Mione had told the man when she’d fled prior to their marriage. He’d discovered a deep-seated hatred of Remus hidden beneath a congenial and quiet exterior. It hadn’t taken much to discover what Rupert wanted; to be magical like the rest of his family. With the Verto Corpus he’d been able to offer a trade to Rupert. He offered Rupert the use of it to provide him with a magical body to inhabit, and in return Rupert would reveal anything that he knew about what Thomas was looking for. Thomas knew that he could have simply ripped apart Rupert’s mind but some of his secrets were hidden by oaths that would have been inaccessible even to him.

Rupert had jumped at the chance. His initial offering had been the information about the four Pillars. After providing it, Thomas had handed over the Verto Corpus before arranging a second meeting with Bill Weasley at the Island to discuss warding where Bill had been petrified and the transference of souls carried out. Thomas had then helped Rupert rip out Bill’s memories from his former body, before spending a few hours showing Rupert how to practice magic. Highly

intelligent and extremely adept, and using Bill's memories to help him, Rupert had easily mastered some of the more difficult spells within a matter of days. His stolen warding skills were now also at Thomas' command.

Thomas' musings were brought to an end as Mione came into his study. "Have you come to drag me out?"

"It's nearly time for dinner." Mione reminded him. "Cammie's reading the twins a bedtime story but I thought you might like to say goodnight to them before dinner starts."

"I do." Thomas put his arm around Mione's shoulders. "I'm thinking of taking a trip out to Cairo in a couple of weeks. Would you like to come with me?"

"I don't know." Mione bit her lip. "It depends on how quickly Remus can find a replacement for me."

"I'll put it off until he does if you're interested in going." Thomas closed the study door behind them. "I thought you might like to see the Egyptian Museum."

Mione's face lit up. "I'd love to if you can wait."

"I'd prefer it." Thomas then led Mione up the corridor and into their children's bedroom.

Next Chapter: Thomas plays hardball; Harry slips back into a familiar role; H.J. and Hermione get married.

Chapter 28: Trials and Tribulations

April 3rd 2004

Cassandra was exhausted and could barely hold her wand in her hand. "I'm done."

"You're done when I say you're done." Harry snapped. "Now do it again, Black."

Cassandra lifted her wand. "Confringo." Cassandra's hand was shaking so hard that the spell missed the dummy by a mile.

"Again." Harry ordered.

"No." Cassandra had had enough, and headed for the door.

"Black, get back here." Harry instructed in a tone that wasn't meant to be ignored.

Cassandra halted and turned, tears in her eyes. "I just can't do it, Harry. I'm sorry but I can't."

"Okay, Cass, that's enough then. Head back to your room and get showered." Harry had started calling Cassandra by her last name and pushing her when cajoling and being nice hadn't been cutting it. As much as he didn't like doing it, it had worked.

Cassandra wished for a sofa and sank onto it when it appeared, ignoring Harry's final instruction. "Wake me up for dinner."

Harry knew that he needed to keep his own training up. "If you're going to stay, keep out of the way."

Cassandra gave a tiny squeal as Harry aimed his wand at the sofa, and it shot across the room to the outside wall. "What are you doing?"

Harry stripped down to his sweat pants. "Exercising."

Cassandra watched in fascination as Harry wished for four opponents, and he took them on the same time. As one of the opponents found a chink in Harry's defenses and went for his back with a knife, Cassandra screamed. "Watch out."

Harry stopped the simulation. "Cassandra, please be quiet. If I get hurt, it will heal. If you can't keep quiet, then get out."

Chastised, Cassandra curled up, and gave a brief smile to Harry. "Sorry."

Harry resumed his practice, including one extra opponent. Focusing on what was ahead, Harry took them down one by one. He was sweating and bloody by the time he'd finished. "Now you can speak."

"Why do you let yourself get hurt like that?" Cassandra could see that one of the daggers that had been used on Harry had sank quite deep into his arm.

"Because it keeps me on my toes." Harry healed the worst of his injuries, wincing as his arm let him know it wasn't happy at the abuse it had just taken. "It also reminds me that I'm not infallible. Every opponent I take on in this room is as good as I am."

Cassandra drank the water that the room had supplied her with. "What will you do when you leave Hogwarts?"

"James has already said I can use the Room for practice whenever I want to." Harry revealed that Hogwarts' newly appointed Headmaster had given him permission. "Now I'm going swimming. Do you want to join me?"

"I can barely swim at all." Cassandra admitted. "Just enough to get by, so I'd rather not."

"Tough." Harry wished for a one piece suit and threw it over to Cassandra. "There's a changing room over there. We'll be adding this to your training."

Cassandra wished she'd gone back to her room to shower. After changing she slipped into the water. Harry was sitting on the side. "Swim two laps for me."

Cassandra splashed her way up and down the pool. Harry frowned. "Your technique is terrible. You need to keep your head steady and only lift your face out of the water when you need to breathe." Harry watched Cassandra swim another lap. "Let your body roll a little, and stretch your arm forwards at the start of the stroke and let your shoulders and hips follow."

Cassandra tried doing it how Harry was telling her, but couldn't get it right no matter how hard she tried. "Can I watch you?"

Harry got up and dove into the pool, emerging almost halfway up the pool before smoothly swimming to the end and returning. "Now swim with me."

Cassandra did as she was told, struggling to keep up with Harry. After three more laps, she couldn't go any further, stitch burning her side, and so she got out. "I really am done now. And I need to get showered and changed."

Harry frowned. "What time is it?"

"Almost six." Cassandra informed him as she checked. "Do you have somewhere to be?"

"A date." Harry thought he'd told Cassandra. "I'd better get out as well. I didn't realize it was this late."

"Who with?" Cassandra asked nosily.

"Sarah Godfrey." Harry gave the name of a former classmate. "She's been helping out at St. Mungo's, and I met her when I dropped by to see how FBW was doing."

"Harry, she's bloody awful." Cassandra exclaimed.

“I don’t exactly think much of Fred Weasley.” Harry countered. “Yet you’re seeing him tonight.”

“He’s very pleasant.” Cassandra argued. “He was an absolute gentleman when I twisted my ankle in his store.”

Harry shrugged. “So I guess we’re even on our opinions of each other’s dates.”

“I guess we are.” Cassandra got up. “I’ll see you tomorrow morning.”

“Don’t forget you’ve got your second test.” Harry reminded her. “So don’t stay out late.”

“No Dad.” Cassandra remarked a little snottily as she closed the door behind her.

After their time on the beach, the pair had taken a step backwards and reiterated that they should just be friends. They’d therefore both agreed to, and had actively started dating other people. However, to Harry it seemed that Cassandra went out of her way to try and find the person who Harry would find most annoying.

Harry too had had several dates but he’d not taken any of them further than a first date. Despite telling Cassandra he just wanted to be friends, he’d found it hard not to compare his dates to her. Knowing he was going to get nowhere thinking like that, Harry picked up his things and followed in Cassandra’s footsteps.

April 6th 2004

Harry walked out of the Chamber and back to his rooms. Cassandra was there waiting for him. “The house-elves have left you some breakfast, and I’ve got everything ready for classes. I’ve got a meeting with Aurora in ten minutes so I need to go. She wants to discuss the changes to the program that we suggested, so I’ll see you tonight.”

“I’ll eat later.” Harry yawned. “I’m just too tired right now.” After a tedious Saturday evening date, carrying out Cassandra’s tests on the Sunday, taking classes the previous morning and his change, Harry wanted nothing more than to climb into his bed and sleep.

Cassandra let herself out and headed off to the Deputy Headmistress’ office, while Harry showered quickly and then fell into bed. Harry hadn’t even been asleep for two hours when his ring began vibrating urgently. Harry groaned. “Not today.”

Closing his eyes he tried to ignore it but the ring persistently vibrated, so Harry angrily threw back the covers. He then got dressed and grabbed a vial of pepper-up potion and several portions of the toast that had been left under a warming spell, before walking out of his room and down to the apparition point.

Sirius smiled apologetically at Harry when he walked into his office. “I’m sorry to bring you in, Harry but it’s an emergency, and Bella is off sick.”

Harry knew that the pepper-up potion he’d taken would keep him going for quite a while. “It’s alright, Sirius. What’s happened?”

“The French Ministry has been attacked.” Sirius picked up his cloak. “We’re going there now.”

Harry had the sinking feeling that it was going to be a very long day. “Why are we being called in?”

“Because from what I can gather from Henri’s brief note, it was basically a massacre, so Henri has requested our help.” Sirius threw Harry a portkey. “Let’s go.”

On arrival, Harry found himself following Sirius into what looked like a war zone. “Do we know who attacked them?”

“Not yet.” Sirius found the head of the French Auror Division talking with two of his team. “Henri.”

“Sirius.” Henri Dompierre-St-Martin shook hands with Sirius. “Thanks for coming.” Henri looked expectantly at Harry.

Sirius did the introductions. “This is an associate of mine, Harry Sebastian. Harry, this is Henri Dompierre-St-Martin, the ministre de la Défense.”

“It’s just Henri.” Henri thought Harry looked terribly young. “Are you a new recruit, Monsieur Sebastian?”

“It’s Harry, and no I’m not.” Harry hid his aggravation at Henri’s assumption.

“Harry’s actually taking over from Bella when she leaves at the end of the May.” Sirius explained. “He’s going to be Alain’s counterpart.”

Henri couldn’t hide his shock. “Forgive my surprise, Harry, but you look very youthful, and this is the first time I’ve even been made aware that you have anything to do with the British Auror Division. To be honest I thought you were a teacher at Hogwarts.”

“I am a teacher but I’m a lot older than I look.” Harry explained simply. “And a lot more experienced.”

“Of course.” Henri’s voice displayed some cynicism at Harry’s remark but he had more important things to be worried about. “I’d have introduced you to Alain but he’s vanished.”

Sirius frowned. “You don’t think he was part of this do you?”

“Absolutely not.” Henri was vehement in his rebuttal of Sirius’ question. “According to my only witness, he was taken by several of our attackers.”

“And do you know who did this?” Harry asked briskly.

“No.” Henri himself had been on vacation, and hadn’t witnessed the attack. “But according to Claudette Voignier, a third year trainee, there were about fifteen of them, including their leader. She has

provided me with her memory of the attack, but I haven't had a chance to review it yet. Claudette was the only survivor on the second floor."

Sirius knew that this was where the Auror Division was based at the French Ministry. "Merlin, Henri. How many did you lose?"

"Thirty-two Aurors, and six third year trainees." Henri's voice was grave as he responded. "Which leaves us seriously understaffed. We had fifteen Aurors off duty who have come in this morning, as well as the ten Aurors who were out in the field at the time. Thankfully the first and second year recruits were all out of the building at a training course off site."

Harry knew that the loss was a crippling blow to the French Auror Division. "Can we see the memory?"

"Of course." Henri led the way to a room on the first floor that had been set up as his temporary office. "I just need to key you both into the wards."

Harry and Sirius waited patiently as Henri did just that. Henri then opened the door to the office and closed it behind them. "Minier."

A small house elf appeared and bowed low. "Monsieur Henri?"

"Mon pensieve." Henri didn't bother with please or thank you.

A few moments later Minier returned and handed it over. Henri poured liquid from a vial into the pensieve. "Unfortunately Claudette was unconscious for a lot of the time so this is all we have to go on."

The three men plunged into the pensieve, and Claudette's memory began.

The memory was less than two seconds old when Henri caught the look Harry and Sirius shared. "You know this man?"

Sirius stopped the memory. "His name is Dominus, and those are his followers."

"Merde!" Henri exclaimed, as he realized who the man was. "It is the same man who attacked you?"

"Yes." Sirius confirmed. "But the attack then was, as you know, on a much smaller scale."

"How did you survive, when so many here did not?" Henri couldn't help but stare at the frozen image of Dominus while he questioned Sirius.

"Because I had help." Sirius said cryptically. "I'll show you the memory when we've finished watching this. "

The three men watched the memory unfold as Henri began it again. The Frenchman grew pale as he watched Dominus pick off his men almost effortlessly. Alain, who'd tried defending himself, was soon overcome, and he was grabbed by two white-masked Death Eaters before the memory grayed as Claudette passed into unconsciousness. "I've never seen anything like it. Dominus executed almost half of my men on his own. How can one man do that?"

"Power, plain and simple." Harry answered.

Henri was having trouble dealing with the relentless slaughter he'd just seen. "Was this Dominus as ruthless when he attacked you?"

"If you include my torture, then he was worse." Sirius felt a cold shiver run down his back at the memory. "Here he was simply killing. I'll show you the memory now."

The three men stepped out of the pensieve, and Sirius withdrew his memory of the attack and placed it into the pensieve.

After resuming their positions, Henri watched the memory unfold, wincing as he watched Dominus strike Sirius again and again. "What is that?"

“Muggles call it a knuckleduster.” Sirius explained. “But Dominus added a few spells to it. If he hadn’t nearly killed me by slitting my throat, then if they’d gone untreated my injuries would have finished off me. The spells meant that I would have slowly burnt up from the inside out, as the burns you can see on my face and back spread inside of me as well.”

Henri felt nauseous. “How did he even know where the Clavis is being kept?”

“He didn’t so far as we can work out.” Harry surmised. “We believe he thinks it’s being kept in the British Ministry or, now obviously, the French Ministry.”

“But what does he want it for?” Henri continued to watch the memory as he pursued his line of questioning.

“As even we don’t know what it does, we can’t answer that.” Sirius hated the next part of the memory as Cassandra was kicked to the floor by Harry and the killing curse flew over her head.

As he observed the memory, Henri’s interest fell upon the one person who’d been able to stand up to Dominus. “Who is this Unspeakable? He seems to be handling himself well enough.”

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you that.” Sirius responded apologetically. “But he is probably one of the few people who may hold an outside chance of dealing with Dominus.” The memory ended before Dominus left. “Dominus departed just after this. But we deduced he has Muggle connections of some sort, maybe through a half blood, as the explosion in the Ministry was caused by a Muggle bomb, and not by magic.”

“Why would he bother doing that?” Henri was a little confused as to Dominus’ motives in using a Muggle bomb especially after seeing how easily he’d dealt with his own men.

“We don’t think he expected to be detected.” Sirius, Bella and Harry had discussed the attack in detail to arrive at the conclusion. “We think he intended to extract the information from me, kill me, and apparate out, leaving the floor to be destroyed, thus covering up his tracks.”

“How did the Unspeakable know his name? It’s not as if he’s announced himself to the world.” Henri recalled Harry using Dominus’ name during the attack on Sirius.

“That’s classified, I’m afraid.” Sirius couldn’t tell him about Harry.

Knowing he wouldn’t get anymore than that out of Sirius, Henri replayed Harry’s use of the threefold spell. “I’ve never seen a technique like that before. He looks as if he’s used three spells one after the other but they’re interlaced. It’s not supposed to be possible. So how does he do it?”

“I’ve never used it myself.” Sirius replied honestly. “But under the circumstances I’m sure Altus would be willing to share.”

“Altus?” Henri asked.

“The Unspeakable’s code name. “ Harry informed him, before asking a question related to something he’d noticed as he’d watched Claudette’s memory. “Tell me, Henri, how fit are your men? Do they continue to exercise as well as practice their spell techniques?”

“Why would they do that?” Henri was a little confused by the question. “They all passed the fitness course we set down for them during their training to become Aurors.”

“Because it would give them an edge.” Harry explained. “Your men didn’t appear agile enough. Most of our Aurors would have stood a better chance than they did.”

Henri couldn’t help but be dismissive of Harry’s claim. “Monsieur, our Aurors are amongst the best in the world.”

Harry noticed that Henri had suddenly stopped using his first name. "Henri, I'm not trying to insult your team but to help them."

Sirius intervened. "What Harry is trying to say is that perhaps you might like to consider including some sort of mandatory exercise for your qualified Aurors as well as your trainees. We had the same problem ourselves, until Altus suggested we might wish to make sure our qualified Aurors retained some sort of fitness level instead of relying purely on their magical skills."

Henri rubbed his chin. "I will consider it. But right now I need to get back to my investigation."

Sirius knew that Henri needed all the help he could get. "When I go, I'll leave a team of eight Aurors."

"USAD have made a similar offer." Henri revealed. "Which I have accepted."

Sirius had an idea. "Henri, if you are interested, I can arrange for Altus to spend some time training your teams in some of the techniques he uses, including the threefold spell."

Henri rubbed his chin again as he debated Sirius' offer. "If I deem it necessary after a review, then I'll contact you."

Harry had a feeling that pride was going to get in the way, and he just hoped that Henri's remaining men wouldn't live to regret it.

After Sirius and Harry had spent several hours with Henri, they portkeyed back to the Ministry; thankfully a lot sooner than Harry had expected. "I was worried we'd be there all day."

"I think we might have been but you offended Henri." Sirius pointed out.

"Henri's a fool." Harry didn't pull any punches. "Not only were some of his men perceptibly unfit, but they were sloppy, and they paid the price. What was your opinion?"

“I have to agree with you.” Sirius said honestly. “But I don’t see Henri taking up my offer. He’s a great believer in doing things his way, just as I believe in doing things mine.”

“I can’t say I’m that upset about not having to spend time training his men.” Harry admitted. “Particularly if they’re as inflexible as he is.”

“You may still find you have to do that.” Sirius didn’t really want to let Harry go, but apart from H.J., Harry was the only person who had any experience in dealing with Dominus. “I’m thinking of making a similar offer to Michaela Bradford, USAD’s head. They’ve never dealt with anyone like Dominus before, and I think they’re going to be surprised if they have to, particularly if Dominus discovers that the Clavis is being held there.”

“Do you think she’ll accept?” Even though he was being selfish, Harry hoped that she wouldn’t. He already had enough to do with teaching at Hogwarts, helping Sirius out and training Cassandra.

“I don’t know. Like Henri, she’ll probably carry out a review, and then come back to me.” Sirius knew that Michaela Bradford was somewhat more flexible than Henri, however. “I’ve got a meeting with her at the end of May. If she hasn’t made a decision by then, I’ll show her my memory of my attack.”

“I’ll make sure I’ve got every ready if I have to go but I was hoping to complete Cass’ third year of training before then; well at least the academic side of it.” Harry knew that they were making good progress, and Cassandra had gotten through the academic part of the training far quicker than Harry could have imagined possible.

“How did she do in the tests on Sunday?” Sirius hadn’t seen her results.

“I didn’t bring the results with me, but she beat every single one of the second year trainees this year. She even beat some of my scores.” Harry had been delighted, and hadn’t minded.

“Does she know that?” Sirius asked.

Harry shook his head. “She thinks she barely passed. I don’t want her to let up.”

“You do know she’s going to be angry when she finds out what we’re doing?” Sirius knew that he was going to get it in the neck from his daughter when she found out that they wanted her to pass the course so that she could obtain full Auror status; something she’d been adamant she wasn’t interested in.

“She’ll only get the opportunity to try out for the final test if one of the recruits fails.” Harry reminded Sirius. “And she has to undergo the Cruciatus and the Imperius after that to give her full Auror status. We can’t make another exception for Cass. We’re already pushing it letting her take the course like this, as I’m well aware that if she passes everything, it will open you up to criticism that you’ve only allowed her to fast track the course because she’s your daughter.”

“I can live with the criticism; you wouldn’t be taking Bella’s job if I couldn’t.” Sirius knew that he was going to receive hefty flack when Harry’s new position became generally known. “Harry, if she makes it through the final test, and she decides to undergo the Unforgivables, will you do it?”

Harry had expected Moody to be the one to do it. “I don’t know if I can, Sirius.”

“I know I can’t, and I trust you, Harry.” Sirius respected Alastor but Harry had been using the curses as part of the training for years. “Please?”

Harry wasn’t happy about it but knew that he could tone down as much as possible. “If she gets through, and there’s a space for her, then yes, I’ll do it. But she’s going to have to go two minutes at dueling with me. I fancy her chances better with Alastor.”

“I know you do.” Sirius got up. “But I’d feel better if it was you doing it.”

“I don’t think we should worry about it yet.” Harry also got up. “She’s got to pass the course; one of the trainees has to fail the final obstacle course, and Cassandra would have to pass it before we need to be concerned about that.”

“I know my daughter which is why I’m worrying about it now.” Sirius just knew that Cassandra would pass everything. “Look, you’d best get back. I’ll be in touch if I need you.”

“I’ll send you a copy of Cass’ scores.” Harry shook Sirius’ hand and apparated out directly from Sirius’ office.

June 19th 2004

Mione knew that Thomas was going to be unhappy as she apparated home, as she was late yet again. Hurrying into the dining room, she found that Thomas was just finishing dessert. “I’m so sorry I’m late.”

“I’m surprised you even bothered to come home at all.” Thomas’ voice dripped with sarcasm.

“I said I was sorry.” Mione sat down at the table and buttered a bread roll. “You know how busy it’s been with Jessica being new, and she already had her vacation booked, so we couldn’t turn her down.” Mione’s assistant had been working for her for almost three months but for the last three weeks had been on a vacation that had already been arranged before she’d started working for Mione.

“Remus should have found someone to cover her until she returned.” Thomas snapped. “In the last three months, I’ve been lucky to spend five minutes with you.”

“Jessica is due back next week, so everything should go back to normal.” Mione put down the roll, her appetite gone.

“You said that when I let you go to Cleveland for two weeks in May.” Thomas got up. “Jessica will come back, and there will be another

excuse. Since you agreed to cut back, I doubt that you've stuck to our agreement for more than three weeks."

"Which is the reason I knew I shouldn't have agreed to it in the first place." Mione stood up as well.

"Well, I'm sick of it. I see less of you now than I did before we agreed to your cutting back." Thomas put down his napkin, and stalked over to where Mione was standing. "If it doesn't come to an end I want you to resign."

"No." Mione refused pointblank. "And you can't make me."

Thomas raised an eyebrow. "I think you're forgetting that I can. You're my wife, Mione, and you belong to me."

Mione got even angrier at Thomas' possessive tone. "I belong to myself. And you knew when you married me how I felt about my job."

"I also thought I knew how you felt about me." Thomas snarled. "But obviously your job comes first."

"That's not fair." Mione hadn't meant it like that. "I love you and the children."

"It doesn't feel like it." Thomas said coldly. "Tell me, Mione, when was the last time we made love?"

Mione scowled. "I've been tired."

"You're always bloody tired." Thomas was fed up with the excuses. "If you'd cut back on your job as you were supposed to, then you wouldn't be."

"You know I can't." Mione began to defend herself. "Remus needs..."

Thomas cut her off. "What about what I need, Mione? What our children need? When are you going to start putting us first?"

“As I tried to tell you, Jessica will be back shortly.” Mione argued. “Things will be different then.”

“No, Mione, they won’t.” Thomas had heard it before. “If you don’t cut back as you promised, then perhaps it’s time you learnt you what a good pureblood wife should be like.”

Mione went pale. “If you invoke those vows, I swear I’ll leave you.”

“And I’ll bring you back.” Thomas wasn’t about to let Mione walk out on him. “You’re mine, Mione, and those rings you wear tell the world that.”

“Have them back then.” Mione tugged at the rings. “Take them off, Thomas.”

“That’s never going to happen.” Thomas refused. “Now I’m going to bed. You’re welcome to join me if you can actually remember where my bedroom is.”

“I’d rather sleep with a snake.” Mione snapped as she gave up trying to pull her rings off.

Thomas stalked out, and Mione slumped back into her seat, before starting to cry. After a few minutes she pulled herself together and apparated up to her room. Once inside, she opened up her briefcase and looked at the papers she brought home to show Thomas. “He can bloody well wait.”

Shoving them back into the briefcase, she headed into the shower before getting into bed and spelling off the lights.

June 26th 2004

Heathrow Airport

Harry was glad to be back home after spending three weeks in the US; Michaela Bradford having taken Sirius up on his offer. Harry

cleared Customs and headed for the apparition point only to hear a voice calling his name. Looking ahead he grinned as he spotted its owner. "Cass."

Cassandra rushed over to Harry, and was surprised when he picked her up and swung her around. "Harry!"

Harry put Cassandra down but didn't let her go. "Merlin, I've missed you."

Cassandra felt her heart jump at Harry's words. "Well I'm not sure that I've missed you."

"Not even a little?" Harry still didn't let Cassandra go.

Cassandra looked up at Harry. "A little I suppose."

At Cassandra's admission, Harry grinned and finally released her, only to sling his arm around her shoulder. "I need to drop my stuff off, and then report in to Sirius."

Cassandra told Harry where her father was. "Dad's actually at my apartment waiting for you."

"In that case, I'd better do this here." Harry dropped the bag he was carrying and wrapped his arms around Cassandra's waist before kissing her.

Cassandra forgot about the people passing by her as she kissed Harry back, before taking a deep breath as he released her. "I thought we were going to stop doing this."

"We were." Harry picked up the bag. "But I've missed you."

Cassandra looked down at the floor. "Harry, I'm seeing someone."

Harry felt as if he'd been punched in the stomach. "I'm sorry. I wouldn't have done that if I'd known."

“I should have stopped you.” Cassandra wanted to touch Harry’s arm but she didn’t dare.

“I obviously surprised you.” Harry began walking briskly towards the apparition point. “So, who is it?”

“One of the trainees, Simon Valdez. I met him when I attended one of the training sessions with Auror Moody during your absence.” Cassandra could hear the hesitance in her voice as she stepped into the large area set aside for incoming and outgoing apparition. “We’ve been out on a couple of dinner dates.”

“And he’s not afraid of Sirius?” Harry stepped away from Cassandra.

Cassandra shrugged. “He doesn’t appear to be, but it could just be bravado.” Cassandra found herself at the front of the line.

“I’ll just drop my bag off, and meet you at your apartment.” Harry waited expectantly for Cassandra to disappear. “Off you go; I don’t want Sirius thinking I’d leave his daughter standing alone.”

“I’m going.” Cassandra vanished.

Harry did the same and dropped his bag as soon as he appeared in his sitting room. He then apparated upstairs.

An hour later he was back in his apartment. He knew that Cassandra had been hurt that he hadn’t wanted to stay and talk but he’d told her he was tired. He sat down on his sofa and thought about how he felt about Cassandra dating Valdez. Harry wasn’t sure he liked it, and as much as he hated admitting it to himself, he didn’t want to share his friend with anyone else.

Next Chapter: Sorry, H.J. and Hermione's wedding day is next chapter now; Cammie aids Thomas; Rupert finds out that being a Death Eater isn't all smooth sailing.

Chapter 29: Another Discovery

July 17th 2004

Hermione couldn't stop the tears as the Minister pronounced her and H.J. husband and wife. H.J. wiped away a tear with his thumb. "I love you."

"And I love you." Hermione took a deep breath and closed her eyes as H.J. kissed her.

Harry, H.J.'s best man, grinned delightedly as he stood by Tonks, who had acted as Hermione's chief bridesmaid. The couple walked out past them and Tonks sniffled. Harry handed over his handkerchief. "I'd never have pegged you as a crier."

"Well I am." Tonks wiped her eyes. "She looked lovely."

"She did." Harry agreed that Hermione had looked the prettiest he'd ever seen her. "And so do you."

Tonks snorted. "Harry, you don't have to be polite."

"I'm not." Harry assured her. "And I'm sure Cammie would agree."

Cammie, who was standing to the side holding Maddie, nodded in response. Hermione had asked Mione if her children could act as a flower girl and pageboy, and despite their young ages, Mione had happily agreed.

"Cammie would agree to anything today." Tonks argued with Harry. "She's finally gotten the mother she's always wanted."

"She deserves it." Harry held out his arm to Tonks. "We'd best go do the whole photograph scenario."

"I hate this part." Tonks complained. "I look awful in photos."

“No-one likes the way they look in photos.” Harry flashed a smile at Cassandra as he walked by her.

Tonks caught it. “Is there something going on between you two?”

Harry shook his head. “She’s just a friend, Tonks. And I think Valdez might have something to say about it if there was.”

Tonks glanced back at the dark-haired man who was sitting next to Cassandra. “You don’t like him very much do you?”

“Not particularly.” Harry admitted. “But it’s not my job to like the trainees; just to train them.”

The two soon found themselves outside, and spent the next thirty minutes having their photos taken with the rest of the wedding party. The entire group then moved on to the ballroom where dinner went by and dancing began. After H.J. had had his dance with Hermione, everyone else joined them.

Thomas held out his hand to Mione. “Would you like to dance?”

Seeing as they’d barely spoken a word to each other all day, Mione was surprised by Thomas’ offer. “Okay.”

Thomas could feel the tension in his wife as he held her. “Mione, relax.”

Mione let out the breath she’d been holding. “I’m sorry. It’s just that... well you know.”

Thomas knew what Mione was trying to say. “I do but I wish I didn’t.”

Mione met his eyes for the first time that day. “Why is it all going so wrong, Thomas? I thought I couldn’t be happier when we were married here, and now it just seems as if I can’t do anything right.”

Thomas knew that he was partly to blame for that. “Some of that is my fault. I’m angry with Remus for pushing more work onto you; I’m

angry with Jessica for taking vacation and I'm even angrier at you for letting them. Unfortunately it's been you who's been taking the brunt of it all."

At Thomas' admission, Mione made one of her own. "I could have said no."

"Why didn't you?" Thomas stroked Mione's hair.

Mione closed her eyes, relishing the feeling of Thomas' hand on her hair. "Because I don't want to relinquish my hold on my work. I like Jessica but I'm always worrying she'll do something wrong, or she won't do it the way I want it done. It's ridiculous isn't it?"

"No, it's not." Thomas kissed the top of Mione's head. "Power is a hard thing to give up, Mione."

"Power?" Mione opened her eyes and looked up at Thomas.

"Yes, Mione, power." Thomas stared back at her. "You have power over Jessica. By limiting what she does, you're wielding that power."

"But I'm not like that." Mione objected.

"I think you are." Thomas said softly. "Admit it. You like calling the shots."

Mione faltered as she acknowledged what Thomas was saying. "Oh Merlin, I'm a horrible person."

"No, you're not." Thomas pulled away from her. "Come with me."

Mione followed Thomas out to the verandah. "I didn't see it. I thought I was being careful, not bossy. I wasn't though, was I? I like holding the control I have. What kind of a person does that make me?"

"A normal one." Thomas pulled Mione down onto a bench with him. "The question is, what are you going to do about it, now you know?"

Mione leant against Thomas. "I'm going to have to give up some of that power and learn to trust Jessica, aren't I?"

"That would be a start." Thomas put his arm around Mione's shoulders. "You need to try to delegate. Just because you're handing things off to Jessica doesn't mean that you're handing over control. You'll still retain the final say so over her, as Remus does over you."

"I'm going to have to be firmer with him as well, aren't I?" Mione finally acknowledged another one of their problems.

"You are if we're ever going to sort things out between us." Thomas knew that he had to make some sort of concession as well. "And I'll try to be more patient while you do that. I've been on a short fuse lately as things haven't been going as well as they could with my projects, and I've let my anger about that spill over when we've been arguing."

Mione sat up. "I'm going to tell Remus that I definitely can't work anymore than three days a week from now on."

"Do you think he'll stick to it?" Thomas knew what a workaholic Remus was.

"He'll have to. I'll going to tell him that it's affecting my marriage, and that if it comes down to choosing, it's going to be you." Mione didn't like making an ultimatum but she wasn't willing to sacrifice her marriage for her work. "But if I do cut back then I might need to bring work home. I know we agreed that I wouldn't but it's just not working out."

"If that's what you have to do, then I'd rather you do that." Thomas was willing to concede that much if it meant seeing more of his wife. "I'm just glad that we've finally sat down and talked about it instead of screaming at each other."

"So am I." Mione wiped away the tears of relief that had come to her eyes. "I've hated arguing."

“You’re not alone.” Thomas bent his head and kissed his wife. “I’ve missed you.”

“And I’ve missed you.” Mione glanced around. “Do you think anyone would miss us if we disappeared?”

“I wouldn’t give a damn if they did.” Thomas pulled Mione to her feet. “Right now though, I regret giving up our house to H.J. for the evening.”

“I think it was a lovely gesture.” Mione was aware that it had been Rebecca’s suggestion, and Thomas had gone along with it. “But as long as I’m with you, I don’t care where I spend the night.”

Thomas wrapped his arm around Mione’s waist and the two of them vanished.

The Next Morning

Mione lay on top of Thomas, panting as she got her breath back. “I don’t think I can move.”

“Then don’t.” Thomas was in no hurry for Mione to stir. “We can stay here as long as you want to.”

“Forever?” Mione asked.

“I promise.” Thomas kissed her nose. “If forever is what you want, then forever is what you’ll get.”

Mione giggled. “I think forever is out of your price range, Thomas.”

“You’d be surprised at what I can afford.” Thomas smiled widely, glad to see his wife back to her usual self. “And I’d give you anything.”

“I know you would.” Mione felt a wave of love wash over her, and she kissed Thomas fiercely. “I don’t ever want to argue like that again.”

“Neither do I.” Thomas stroked her back. “But right now I don’t really want to discuss what’s gone.”

“What do you want to talk about then?” Mione raised herself up on her arms so that she could look down at him.

Thomas shrugged. “I don’t know. You pick.”

“How about if I tell you that I’ve got something for you for a change.” Mione said excitedly.

“As long as I’ve got you, I don’t need anything else.” Thomas could see though that Mione was pleased about whatever it was.

Mione smirked. “I think you’ll find that you want this.”

Thomas was completely intrigued. “Okay. So what is?”

“The location of the Validus Saxus.” Mione watched as pleasure filled Thomas’ face.

Thomas rolled Mione off him and looked down at her. “You’ve found it?”

“I have.” Mione bit her lip, and her face fell a little. “But you’re going to be angry.”

Thomas wondered what made Mione think he’d be annoyed. “Why?”

“I’ve known about it ever since we had that argument when you threatened to use our wedding vows.” Mione admitted nervously. “I was so angry with you that I didn’t tell you.”

Thomas tamped down on the spark of annoyance that threatened to surge up. “Mione, I admit I’m a little disappointed but that doesn’t matter now. So where is it?”

Mione began to tell him what she'd found out as the two of them started to get showered and dressed, before heading out into the gardens to take a walk before breakfast.

On the other side of the gardens, Cammie was taking Maddie for a walk in her pushchair as the little girl had woken up early, and had been fretting. "Can you see the pretty flower, Maddie?"

"Fwww." Maddie tried to imitate Cammie.

"That's right." Cammie praised the pretty little toddler. "It's a flower."

Maddie pointed out a butterfly. "Mama."

Cammie grinned. "No, Maddie. That's a butterfly."

"Dada." Maddie pointed at the ground.

Cammie screamed.

Hearing the scream, Thomas' head span round, and grabbing Mione's hand, he apparated in the direction of it. Mione gasped as they appeared next to her daughter and Cammie. A smallish light brown snake was visible in the grass at the base of her daughter's pushchair. Not giving herself time to consider what Thomas would think, Mione hissed at it before Thomas even had time to draw his wand. "Get away from her."

The snake turned its attention to Mione. "I will not harm the nestling."

"Go then." Mione demanded.

The snake slithered off. Cammie was crying and holding her leg. "It bit me."

Thomas picked up the weeping girl. "We keep anti-venom potion in the house. Take Maddie."

Mione grabbed the pushchair and vanished with her daughter, reappearing inside in the hallway. Maddie appeared unharmed as she held up her arms. "Mama."

Mione unstrapped her daughter, picked her up, and walked into the drawing room where Thomas was administering the potion to Cammie. "Will she be alright?"

Thomas nodded. "She'll be fine."

Cammie wiped her eyes with her sleeve. "Uncle Thomas has healed my bite marks."

"What happened?" Mione asked softly.

"We were looking at the flowers and Maddie had seen a butterfly. She said Mama and then pointed at the ground and said Dada. When I saw the snake I thought it was going to hurt Maddie so I stood in front of her. It hissed at me, and Maddie made a funny hissing noise like you made, and then the snake bit me." Cammie explained.

Thomas looked expectantly at his wife, who sighed. "I should have told you before but I can talk to snakes, and judging from what Cammie's just said, I think Maddie can too. She must have inherited it during the adoption ritual."

"That's a very unusual talent." Thomas observed. He, like Mione, had discovered that there was no name for Parseltongue in the world they'd moved to, and therefore there was also no fear attached to the talent, as the Slytherin of this world hadn't been a Parselmouth as far as Thomas had been able to determine.

"One I'd pretty much pushed to the back of my mind." Mione admitted. "I wonder if Maddie is a true speaker or whether she was just imitating the snake."

"Speak to her." Thomas suggested.

"Maddie." Mione gained her daughter's attention before speaking in Parseltongue. "Where's Daddy?"

Maddie pointed to Thomas, and hissed back at her mother. "Daddy." Maddie found it easier to hiss than to speak, as her little mouth had a much easier time coping with making the hissing sounds rather than trying to form syllables as she would if she was trying to speak in English.

Mione raised her eyebrows. "She can definitely understand the language. I wonder if Nat is the same."

"He was sleeping this morning, and Maddie was already awake, so that's why I took her out for a walk. Theresa said it would be alright." Cammie started to cry again. "I didn't know anything would happen."

Thomas put his arm around the girl. "It's okay, Cammie. It's very rare snakes attack like that. It must have understood that Maddie could speak its language, and thought it was defending her against you."

"Tumro." Thomas called out.

A green colored house elf appeared. "Mister Thomas, sir?"

"Please inform H.J. Sebastian that his daughter needs him." Thomas told the house elf. "He's staying in my house."

Tumro vanished and reappeared in the bedroom, startling H.J. "Missie Sebastian needs you."

H.J. groaned. "Where?"

"Drawing room, Big Guest House." Tumro disappeared.

Hermione sat up, blushing as the sheet dropped to her waist. "I think we need to get up."

"My daughter has terrible timing." H.J. dropped a kiss on Hermione's breast. "I was hoping to stay in bed a little longer."

Hermione went even redder. "It must be important, H.J."

H.J. used his finger to stroke Hermione's cheek. "I know but I wanted to make love to you again."

Hermione shivered at H.J.'s touch. "We've got two weeks alone to do that."

H.J. could feel his body reacting to Hermione's nudity. "Are you feeling okay this morning?"

"A little sore." Hermione admitted embarrassedly. "So as much as I want to make love with you, I think we might have to wait until tonight."

"In that case, I think I'd better go see what Cammie wants." H.J. threw back the sheets, smiling as Hermione dropped her eyes. "Take a long bath, and I'll join you when you I've sorted her out."

"Give me a minute, and I'll come as well." Hermione gathered up the sheet and got out of the bed.

After dressing, H.J. and Hermione apparated to the guest house and walked into the drawing room. "A house-elf said that Cammie needed me."

"Dad." At the sight of the couple, Cammie pulled free from Thomas and ran over to her father. "I thought a snake was going to hurt Maddie and it bit me."

"Shh." H.J. held his daughter as she started to cry yet again. He looked over her head at Thomas. "I take it she's alright."

"I've given her a potion and healed the bites. She'll be fine." Thomas assured him. "She was very brave in defending Maddie like that."

Cammie lifted her head, her tears slowing as she felt safe with H.J. holding her. "Maddie can talk to snakes, Dad."

H.J.'s mouth fell open. "What?"

Mione knew that H.J. was already aware of her talent but knew that she had to pretend otherwise. "As can I. It's a talent my daughter seems to have inherited from me."

"So if Maddie can talk to snakes, then why did the snake attack Cammie?" H.J. reluctantly let his daughter pull away so that she could go to Hermione.

"We think it thought that it was defending Maddie." Thomas answered.

H.J. glanced at the tiny girl. "Was she bitten as well?"

Mione shook her head. "No, just Cammie was."

"I'm alright now, Aunt Mione." Cammie had her face wiped by Hermione who was standing with her arm around her new daughter.

"Perhaps we should postpone the honeymoon." Hermione suggested, concern for Cammie uppermost in her mind.

"Mum!" Cammie loved being able to call Hermione that. "You can't do that. I'm fine now. Uncle Thomas is going to take me to the Island and there aren't any snakes there, so I'll be okay."

H.J. knew that Cammie was excited at getting to spend some time alone with Thomas and the twins. "If you're sure, you're okay."

"I'll be fine, Dad." Cammie reassured him. "In fact I'm starving."

Mione was relieved that Cammie's fright seemed to be receding. "As am I. Shall we go get breakfast?"

Thomas let the women leave before turning to H.J. "I'll take good care of her, H.J."

H.J. let out a long breath. "I'm a little transparent aren't I?" H.J. felt a little guilty that he hadn't hurried over when the house elf had told him that Cammie wanted him but he hadn't thought that it had been anything of such major concern.

"You're her father, and you'd be remiss if you didn't have doubts after what has just happened." Thomas told him. "But I won't let anything happen to Cammie. If it makes you any happier, I'll give her a ring that will alert me if there are any problems. My own children and Mione wear something similar. I'm not concerned about when we're on the Island so much but when we go to Cairo, I'm sure Cammie would be happier knowing that I can apparate to her if there's a problem."

H.J. felt the same way. "I'd be grateful."

"Then that's what I'll do." Thomas led the way out of the room.

On the other side of the building, Harry woke up to find a warm body curled up against his back, and he bit back a groan as he remembered the previous night. Pulling free, he threw back the covers and padded over to the bathroom. After using it, he returned to the bedroom to find Tonks lying on her back looking up at him. "Good morning."

"You regret last night, don't you?" Tonks didn't pull her punches.

Neither did Harry. "Yes."

Tonks, however, surprised Harry with her next comment. "I don't but probably not for the reason you think."

Harry started to pull on his jogging pants. "So what's the reason?"

"I slept with you thinking I was still in love with you, and you were what I wanted." Tonks answered Harry candidly. "But you're not. Sleeping with you has made me realize that it's over. I enjoyed it but it also made me aware that I don't feel the same way about you anymore, hence my not regretting sleeping with you."

Harry couldn't help but feel relieved that Tonks had finally realized she didn't feel like that about him anymore. "So what are you going to do now?"

Tonks leant back against the pillows. "Go back to being me."

Harry sat down next to her as he laced up his trainers. "Don't, Tonks. I think you should find someone who you really care for."

"I've been there, Harry, and it doesn't work for me." Tonks said softly. "If I ever settle down, it will be because of good sex, and nothing else."

"You're only saying that because this time you fell for the wrong person." Harry informed her. "Tonks, you really don't want to live your life based on sex, only to find in twenty years' time that you've made a horrible mistake and you regret it. Sadly you won't be lucky enough to go back and relive it again."

Tonks grinned. "Harry, to listen to you talk, anyone would think you were speaking from experience."

"You'd be surprised." Harry stood up, and opened a drawer to grab a tee-shirt. "I do care about you, Tonks, and I don't want to see you wasting your life on mechanics called Dave."

Tonks frowned before remembering exactly who Harry was talking about. "Point taken."

Harry turned as a knock sounded at the door. "Excuse me." Harry walked over to the door and opened it a little way to find Cassandra standing there. "Cass, what is it?"

"Cammie's been hurt." Cassandra frowned as Harry didn't move aside to let her by. "Is there a reason why you aren't letting me in?"

Harry had little choice except to step back as he let Cassandra into the room. "Is she alright?"

“She’s been...” Cassandra’s words died away as she spotted Tonks lying in Harry’s bed. Recovering, she finished her sentence. “...bitten by a snake but she’s going to be alright. H.J. thought you might want to know so I said I’d tell you, and now I think I’m going to leave.”

“I’ll see you later.” Harry closed the door behind Cassandra as she hurriedly left.

Tonks stared at Harry. “She didn’t seem too happy to see me here. Are you sure there’s nothing going on between the two of you?”

“She’s with Valdez, Tonks.” Harry reminded his former girlfriend before scowling. “Why is it a man can’t have a female best friend without everyone bloody well assuming that they’re sleeping together?”

Tonks merely smirked. “Because my dear Harry, it always boils down to sex. We’re supposed to be friends and look where we ended up. And come to think of it, I don’t know of any of my male friends that I haven’t slept with.”

“You haven’t slept with H.J.” Harry pointed out.

“That’s because he was involved with my friend.” Tonks argued. “And as such that renders him out of bounds.”

“And the fact that I work for Sirius renders Cassandra the same way.” Harry finished tying up his shoes. “I’ll see you later, Tonks.”

When Harry returned, he found Tonks lying on his bed reading one of his magazines. “I thought you’d have gone down to breakfast.”

“I’m going, I’m going.” Tonks dropped the magazine, and got up. “I just wanted to make sure that everything was alright between us before I did.”

Harry pulled Tonks against him in a brief hug. “We’ll always be friends, Tonks.”

Tonks wrinkled her nose. "And you're a friend who needs a shower, Harry."

Harry grinned. "Give me a few minutes and I'll join you for breakfast."

"Catch me up." Tonks headed towards the door. Making her way downstairs and along the corridor to the room that had been set aside for breakfast, she found James Potter finishing a cup of tea. "James, good morning."

"Good morning, Nymphadora. Sleep well?" James' tone was slightly acerbic as he'd seen her and Harry going into Harry's room as he'd made his own way to bed.

Tonks ignored it. "My name is Tonks. You're not my teacher anymore, so why can't you please use it? Everyone else does."

"Because I'm not everyone else, and I think it's a bloody awful name." James put down his teacup. "Such a pretty young woman shouldn't use such a masculine sounding name."

"You think I'm pretty?" Tonks couldn't resist teasing James.

James went red. "You know very well you are."

"I know nothing of the sort." Tonks just thought she was average looking. "But I can be." Tonks metamorphosed into a tall slim, long haired blond. "What do you think?"

"If I was in the market for a hooker, then you'd fit the bill." James didn't know what was up with him that morning as he snapped out his response. "For Merlin's sake, change back."

"Yes, Sir!" Tonks replied tartly, and reverted to her natural look before changing the subject. "So what are you doing today?"

"I've decided to go into Sydney and eat at Doyles for lunch. Thomas recommended it." James finished his cup of tea. "You?"

"I hadn't thought about it." Tonks hadn't really made any plans at all.

James stood up. "Would you like to join me for lunch then?"

Tonks' mouth fell open. "Lunch?"

"Yes, lunch. You know the meal in the middle of the day." James responded sarcastically. "So do you want to join me or not?"

"Okay." A little taken aback at James' uncharacteristically sharp attitude and his offer, Tonks answered automatically before she could think of an excuse.

"In that case, meet me at one o'clock on the front verandah." With that, James walked out of the room just as Harry walked in.

Harry took one look at the stunned look on Tonks' face, and he immediately knew something was up. "What have you done?"

"Gone insane." Tonks dazedly poured herself a glass of juice. "I've just agreed to go to lunch with James Potter."

"What's so insane about that?" Harry opted for apple juice. "He's a very nice, levelheaded person."

"Exactly." Tonks dropped her head onto the table. "What the hell have I let myself in for?"

"Why did you say yes if you don't want to go?" Harry picked up a slice of toast as he waited for a response.

Tonks didn't look up. "I don't know. He said he was going to lunch and would I like to come." Tonks then told Harry about the conversation she'd had with James. "One minute I was angry with him and the next I'm going to lunch with him."

Harry smirked. "You must have wanted to go on some level, otherwise you wouldn't have agreed to it."

“I don’t know what I was thinking.” Tonks started bashing her head against the table. “He’s not even my type.”

“It will do you good.” Harry laughed. “It’s time someone treated you with a firm hand.”

“Don’t even go there, Harry.” Tonks got up. “I’ve lost my appetite.”

“It will give you more room for lunch.” Harry caught the salt cellar that Tonks picked up and threw at him before she stomped out.

As James left the breakfast room, he walked out into the gardens. He hadn’t gone far when he came across Sirius and Faith sitting together on a bench. “Morning.”

Sirius whispered something to Faith, who kissed him on the cheek and got up. “I’ll see you later, James.” With that Faith walked off.

James slumped onto the bench. “Why did you get rid of Faith?”

“You obviously need someone to talk to.” Sirius turned to his friend. “What’s up?”

“I’ve just asked your cousin out to lunch.” James sighed. “And I have no idea why I did it.”

“Back out then.” Sirius suggested. “I’m sure you won’t offend Tonks.”

“That’s the thing. I don’t know if I want to back out.” James ran a hand through his hair in much the same way as Harry usually did. “She’s not my type, she’s bloody infuriating, far too young, and she’s a great deal too promiscuous for her own good. I know she slept with Harry Sebastian last night, and I still asked her out!”

“What happened?” Sirius hadn’t seen James this flustered in a very long time.

James told him. "I don't know what happened. It was as if my mouth had disengaged from my brain; the words just seemed to come out of their own accord."

"James, look at it this way. It's only lunch. If you're both having a terrible time, you just politely leave. As I've already said, Tonks won't be offended." Sirius was struggling to hide his smile as he spoke.

He wasn't doing a great job of it. "You think it's really funny don't you?"

"A little." Sirius let out a barking laugh. "Come on, you've got to admit, you and Tonks? You're the last two people I'd ever put together."

"Quite so." James sighed. "I've no idea what I'm supposed to be doing."

"Just be yourself." Sirius reassured his friend. "I'm sure Tonks will be herself."

James groaned. "That's what I'm afraid of."

Sirius knew then what the problem was. "James, you're just going to take her out to lunch. I doubt Tonks is going to try and bed you in the middle of Sydney."

"I certainly hope not." James looked down at his hands. "I'd be lost if she did."

Sirius threw up a privacy bubble. "When was the last time you slept with someone, James?"

James didn't look at Sirius. "Seven, maybe eight years ago which was the last time I went out on a date!"

Sirius was stunned. "You've not slept with anyone for that long?"

“No, Sirius, I haven't. I haven't had much time for dating with helping to run Hogwarts, to say nothing of spending most of my life inside of it.” James got to his feet. “Forget this. I'm going to cancel.”

“No, you're not. It's time you started dating again.” Sirius grabbed James' arm and pulled him back down. “Now take a deep breath, and listen. I should warn you that things have changed somewhat since you last dated.”

“What do you mean?” James felt alarmed at Sirius' comment.

“Some women like Tonks prefer to pay for their own meals.” Sirius watched dismay cross James' face.

“I can't let a woman pay for a meal I've asked her out to.” James shook his head. “I don't care what she says, I'm the man and I'm paying.”

“Good luck with that.” Sirius knew that Tonks would argue with James about it. “She's pretty stubborn about that sort of thing.”

“Not this time.” James had old-fashioned pureblood values, and he wasn't about to relinquish his hold on them.

Sirius looked James up and down. “And I think you should wear something a little more casual; try slacks and a short sleeved shirt. No tie, James!”

James glanced down at the outfit he was wearing, and got up. “I'd best go get changed into something else then. Is there anything else I should know?”

“Not really.” Sirius stood as well. “Just relax and be yourself. Tonks doesn't bite. At least for your sake I hope not.”

“Funny, Sirius.” James dispelled the privacy bubble. “Hopefully I'll be back later if I survive.”

James apparated away just as Sirius spotted Harry ambling his way. "Good morning, Harry."

"Morning, Sirius." Harry stopped. "Was James telling you about Tonks?"

Sirius grinned widely. "He was."

Harry grinned back. "Tonks is beside herself. I think she's actually nervous."

Sirius was surprised. "Well that makes a change." Sirius had a question for Harry. "You slept with her last night, didn't you?"

Harry's mouth fell open; he hadn't noticed James in the corridor as his attention had been entirely on Tonks. "How did you know?"

"Not telling." Sirius liked to keep his usually savvy number one guessing. "So tell me, given that you slept with her last night, how do you feel about her and James going to lunch together today?"

"Last night was our last mistake." Harry sat down on the bench. "Tonks finally agreed with me that we aren't meant to be. She's vowed to return to her usual ways."

Sirius sat down by Harry. "Not if she's going to lunch with James she won't be."

"He certainly doesn't strike me as the free and easy type." Harry observed, a smile playing around his lips.

Sirius shook his head. "You know very well he isn't."

"Which may be good for Tonks." Harry thought that Tonks needed someone who wasn't going to pander to the young woman's liberal ways.

Sirius smirked. "I think my cousin may have finally met her match. James isn't going to be in hurry to fall into bed with Tonks, no matter how much she might want it."

"Let's just hope she doesn't bail on him then when she doesn't get what she wants." Harry stretched, enjoying the feeling of the warm sun on his exposed skin. He changed the subject. "I really don't want to go back tomorrow."

"Tough, Sebastian." Sirius put on his 'business' voice. "You've got trainee reviews all day Tuesday."

Harry groaned. "I wonder if I was this bad with Orion?"

"I'd say so." Sirius had of course seen Harry's world's version of his son. "And now, if you'll excuse me, my wife is waiting for me to take her and Siri into Sydney. She wants to go shopping."

Harry laughed. "Have fun. I'll think of you when I'm lying by the pool."

"I like shopping." Sirius lied.

"Of course you do, Sir." Harry's tone was slightly insolent as he responded.

Sirius, however, got the last word. "You've also got trainee reviews now on Wednesday as well. I've just decided that you can take mine." With that Sirius disappeared, leaving a scowling and much deflated Harry behind.

July 22nd 2004

Cammie was excited. "Are we really going to the Egyptian Museum, Uncle Thomas?"

"We are." Thomas informed her. "I was supposed to be going with Mione some time ago but due to time constraints now is the first chance we've had."

“And Aunt Mione’s already in Cairo, isn’t she?” Cammie fidgeted in her seat.

“She is.” Thomas smiled as Cammie opened up the guidebook he’d purchased for her. “She arrived this morning.”

Cammie put down the book. “It says that there are snakes in Egypt.”

Thomas knew that Cammie was still nervous after her experience at the weekend. “Which is why you’ll be carrying a vial of anti-venom with you, and why I gave you that ring that only I can take off.”

Cammie looked down at the diamond studded ring that encircled her small finger on her right hand. “How again does it work exactly?”

“If you’re in danger, the ring will vibrate. I have a master ring.” Thomas didn’t mind going over again what he’d already told Cammie, and he held up his right hand to show Cammie the ring on his second finger. “I know from how it feels who’s in danger and I can apparate or portkey to them, as the ring allows both methods of transportation.”

“So what happens if there are wards stopping you?” Cammie ran a finger over her ring.

“Then the ring will place me as close as possible to the person I’m trying to reach but unless they’re very complex, the wards won’t stop me from knowing that something is wrong.” Thomas patiently explained.

“And only Aunt Mione and the twins have rings like this?” Cammie asked.

“They do.” Thomas assured the girl.

“Do you always wear your ring?” Cammie wanted to make sure that Thomas would be able to detect if she got into trouble again.

“If I’m at home with Mione and the twins then I don’t, but I promise I’ll keep it on the whole time we’re here.” Thomas watched Cammie visibly relax. “So don’t get worrying. I’ll take care of you.”

Cammie felt warm inside at Thomas' words. “I’m glad you’re my Uncle.”

“So am I, Cammie.” Thomas got up. “I’m just going to check in with the pilot. It can’t be too much longer before we land.”

“Can I go with you?” Cammie had never been in the cockpit before.

“Of course.” Thomas led the way to the front and opened the door. “Roger, this is Cammie.”

The pilot swung round. “Hello, Cammie.”

“Hi.” Cammie suddenly felt a little shy and hung back behind Thomas.

Thomas turned around. “Do you want to sit in the co-pilot’s seat, Cammie?”

Cammie forgot about her shyness at the opportunity. “Yes please.”

“Do you want to take over, Sir?” Roger offered the controls to Thomas.

“Just for five minutes.” Thomas watched Roger put it on autopilot before taking his place. “Sit down, Cammie, and strap yourself in.”

Cammie did as Thomas asked. “Can you really fly it, Uncle Thomas?”

“I can.” Thomas confirmed.

Cammie glanced over to where Thomas was monitoring the instruments in front of him. “What do all these controls do?”

“They monitor the plane during flight, and the pilot monitors them.” Thomas could see that Cammie was trying to work out what did what. “However, computers do most of the flying for us as this is an FBW.”

“What’s an FBW?” Cammie asked interestedly.

“Fly By Wire.” Roger could see that Cammie had no idea what he was talking about. “In simple terms it just means that most things on the aircraft are centrally controlled by the computer. There are back-ups in case of failure, and we can override the computer if necessary.”

Cammie had yet another question. “So what type of plane is this?”

Roger stood in the doorway, smiling at the excited girl. “This is a Boeing 777-200LR.”

“And how fast can it go?” Cammie tentatively reached out and touched the yoke.

“You can hold it.” Thomas told her. “It’s on automatic pilot at the moment, and in answer to your question, its top cruising speed is 587 mph.”

Cammie’s eyes lit up. “That’s much faster than my broomstick.”

Roger laughed. “A lot faster.”

“Can I fly it?” Cammie was itching to have a go.

“Hold onto the yoke with both hands, and don’t make any sudden movements.” Thomas switched off the autopilot, while maintaining a grip on his own yoke. “You’re flying it.”

Cammie grinned in delight as for the next few minutes Thomas let her take the controls. “That was brilliant. I think I want to be airline pilot when I finish school.”

“Mr. Seville said that you’re attending Berowra.” Roger slipped back into his seat as Thomas got up.

“I transferred from Hogwarts.” Cammie climbed out of the co-pilot’s seat. “And I’m glad I did. Berowra is a brilliant school.”

“My son also goes there.” Roger checked his instrumentation before returning his attention to the girl. “Damien Grant.”

“He’s going to be Head Boy next year when Andrew Johnson leaves.” Cammie blurted out. The announcements had been made just before she’d left to go on holiday.

“I know.” Roger smiled. “So if you ever have any problems, go to him, and tell him I said to make sure he looks after you.”

“I will, Mr. Grant.” Cammie said politely.

“You can call me Roger.” Roger told her. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I need to radio in as we’re going to be beginning our approach soon.”

“I’ll send Carl back up.” Thomas led Cammie down the plane to where the co-pilot was talking to one of the attendants. “Carl, you’re wanted.”

“Yes, Sir.” Carl got to his feet and made his way up the plane.

Geraldine, the attendant, also got to her feet. “Can I get you anything, Mr. Seville.”

“Nothing, Geraldine, thank you.” Thomas led Cammie to her seat. “Strap yourself in.”

Cammie had a question about Roger and Carl. “Uncle Thomas, are Roger and Carl wizards?”

“They’re squibs just like Geraldine.” Thomas explained. “Roger is married to a witch though, and both of his children are magical.”

"Oh." Cammie wondered why they were landing. "Aren't we apparating in?"

"Not this time." Thomas settled himself down as well. "As I'm being met by a Muggle."

"Why not a wizard?" Cammie asked.

"Because I have a couple of business meetings with him in relation to the Foundation." Thomas told her.

Cammie held on tightly to the seat as she felt the plane touch down a short time later, grinning as the engines roared as they helped to slow the plane down. "I loved that part."

"I bet you did." Thomas waited for the plane to come to a halt before getting up. "Let's go."

The Next Day

Cammie slowly wandered around the Museum until she came to the exhibit that Thomas had stopped at and was studying. "What are they, Uncle Thomas?"

"They're called the Cassus Cartouches, Cammie." Thomas walked around them.

Cammie stepped right up to the glass and pressed her nose against it to look closer, only to set off an alarm. "Whoops."

A guard came over. "Step back please."

"Sorry." Cammie had gone red. "Uncle Thomas, I didn't see any signs."

"Couldn't you feel any wards?" Thomas asked.

Cammie shook her head. "Should I have been able to?"

“I would have thought so.” Thomas stared intently at the Cartouches, his attention only half on Cammie.

Cammie glanced upwards. “Uncle Thomas, they’ve got lasers.”

Thomas looked up as well. “That’s why you didn’t feel wards then.” Thomas, however, could feel the faint hum of wards but deduced that they were inside the glass exhibit and not outside.

The guards were beginning to get nervous, and Mione noticed it as she stepped over to join her husband and niece. “I think you should move on, Thomas. You’re making them uncomfortable.”

Thomas glanced over to see that both guards had their wands by their sides. “And we wouldn’t want that now, would we?”

All three of them left and moved onto the next exhibit. “So what did you think of the Cartouches?”

Cammie shrugged. “They’re just a bunch of stone tablets. I picked up a leaflet that was in the holder next to them but I can’t read it. They didn’t have any in English.”

Thomas pulled out his wand and did a translation spell. “Now you can read it.”

Cammie read out loud. “The Cassus Cartouches are believed to predate the Great Pyramids, but as far as teaching us anything useful they are essentially worthless.” She stopped reading. “If they’re worthless then why are they guarded so well?”

“Because they’re very old.” Mione smiled. “You remind me a little of me always asking questions.”

Cammie grinned. “If I didn’t ask questions, then I’d never find anything out.” While she hadn’t been encouraged to do so at Hogwarts, Berowra supported such behavior in its pupils, and now Cammie rarely did anything without questioning it.

“What else does it say?” Mione stopped at an exhibit of a mummy.

Cammie found where she’d left off. ‘The Cartouches originally resided in the Muggle section of the Museum. Muggles believed them to hold mystical powers that were said to grant the holder a long or endless life.’

Mione snorted. “Muggle twaddle.”

Cammie grinned at her aunt. “I bet there are plenty of Muggles who believed it.”

“More fool them then.” Mione had little time for whimsical Muggle fancies. She checked the time. “Cammie, I’m afraid that your Uncle has to go to some meetings now, so once we’ve looked around the Muggle section of the Museum, you’re going to have to go to the bookstore and market with me.”

“When we go to the bookstore can I use some of my allowance if I can find some books I want to read?” Cammie asked hopefully.

“Of course you can.” Mione told her before turning to Thomas. “I’ll see you at the airport at six o’clock.”

“Don’t be late, and be careful.” Thomas ruffled Cammie's hair before leaving.

Three hours later, after spending time looking around the Muggle section of the Museum, Mione had taken Cammie to the bookstore; Mione having placed a temporary translation spell on her niece so that she could read the book titles. A bookworm like Mione, Cammie then spent several hours happily wandering around the store. “I’ve found three books, Aunt Mione.”

“I’ll pay for them.” Mione offered.

“But I’ve got my allowance.” Cammie held out her purse.

Mione whispered in her ear. "But this is a Muggle store, Cammie."

Cammie hadn't realized. "I'll put them back then."

"No you won't." Mione paid for her purchases as well as Cammie's. "It's the least I can do after what you did for Maddie."

"She cried when Uncle Thomas kissed her goodbye." Cammie revealed. "But Nat didn't."

"Nat's very quiet compared to his sister." Mione couldn't get over how different her children were. "And Maddie is very much her father's daughter."

"Like me with Dad." Cammie grinned. "Are we going to the market now?"

"I think it will have to wait for another time; we've spent far too long in here." Mione checked her watch. "It's getting late and we need to start heading out to the airport."

"Okay." Cammie didn't mind, and tucked her books under her arm.

When they arrived at the airport, Thomas was waiting. "Let's get on our way."

Once on board the plane, Cammie took out one of her books. "The spell has worn off, Aunt Mione."

Thomas placed a permanent translation spell on the books. "They'll stay in English now."

Cammie began reading as the plane took off. "This really old one has got more information on those Cartouches you were looking at, Uncle Thomas."

Thomas could see that Cammie was itching to share. "Go ahead and tell us then."

Cammie started reading. 'The Cassus Cartouches are...' She broke off. "This is the same stuff as it said on the leaflet except they don't mention they were in the Muggle section and it just says that people believed they gave long life. I'll skip to the next section."

Mione shared a smile with Thomas as they waited for Cammie to continue. Cammie turned the page. 'The Cartouches were discovered by Dixon Jackson, an American archeologist, in 1812, and disappeared in what is believed to have been a theft in 1927.' Is that when they moved them to the magical section?"

Thomas nodded. "Yes it is."

Cammie went back to her book. 'Jackson claimed that the Cartouches belonged to something called the Four Pilasters but he said that he'd had problems translating the stone he'd found with the Cartouches.'"

Thomas didn't bat an eyelid at the mention of the newly discovered stone, and urged Cammie to carry on reading as she stopped to take a deep breath. Cammie ran her finger along the page as she continued. 'Exactly what the Four Pilasters are is unknown but Jackson claimed that they were stone, spring, sign and schema. However, the stone accompanying the Cartouches was never handed over by Jackson thus undermining his claim.' Cammie halted in her reading again. "What's a schema?"

Mione explained. "A schema is a diagram or a map."

Cammie looked back down at the list. "I wonder what the other things are."

"I've no idea." Mione told her. "But a lot of archaeology finds are like that. Is that all it says about the Cartouches?"

Cammie shook her head. "There's just three more sentences. 'Jackson believed the Cartouches to be the schema in his list. He fell from grace in the archeological community after he claimed that whoever unified the Four Pilasters, using a magical ritual outlined on the stone he'd found with the Cartouches, would live an eternal life

with dominion over all others. However, Jackson never gave up on his search for the remaining three Pilasters and died in 1853, never having found what he was looking for.' Cammie looked at Mione. "More Muggle twaddle?"

Mione grinned. "Absolutely."

Two Days Later

Rupert winced as his Dark Mark flared up. "Dammit."

Despite his annoyance at being disturbed so late at night, Rupert dutifully apparated out.

Thomas glanced over as Rupert knocked on the door of his audience room. "Come in, Rupert."

"Thomas." Even though he didn't know why, Rupert suddenly felt very nervous.

"How is your research coming along?" Thomas asked casually.

"I've been unable to find anything else out." Rupert responded.

"Is that so?" Thomas circled Rupert.

"Yes." Rupert's nervousness now went through the roof.

Thomas came to a standstill in front of Rupert. "Do you consider yourself a good researcher, Rupert?"

"I'd say I'm a fairly adequate researcher." Rupert's voice betrayed his nerves.

"So modest." Thomas unholstered his wand. "Come now, Rupert. We both know that you were able to track down three of the four Pillars in record time, so I'd say that you're a very good researcher. And speaking of the Pillars, it's about the fourth Pillar I wish to speak to you."

“The Cartouches?” Rupert asked hesitantly.

“Yes, Rupert, the Cartouches.” Thomas sat down. “What do you know of them?”

“I’ve already told you everything I know.” Rupert relaxed slightly as Thomas did the same.

“What resources did you source?” Thomas enquired.

“Watcher texts, Muggle books, wizarding archives.” Rupert listed some of the things he’d used.

“If that’s so, then perhaps you would like to tell me why my niece was able to provide me with information from a Muggle book of all things, that I believe you should have known?” Thomas asked in a silky voice.

Rupert swallowed. “What information?”

“That there was another stone with the Cartouches; one that gave more information about how the Pillars should be used.” Thomas stood back up. “Cammie found this in a Muggle book, Rupert. Now why is it that I think you were holding out on me?”

Rupert paled. “I swear I didn’t know.”

“I don’t believe you.” Thomas sighed disappointedly. “Crucio.”

Rupert had never known such agony before as he collapsed under the onslaught of Thomas’ softly spoken curse.

Thomas watched dispassionately until he lifted the spell. “Shall we try that again?”

Rupert was in tears. “Please, I swear I really didn’t know.”

“Crucio.” Thomas repeated the spell, this time putting more power behind it.

Rupert twisted and contorted on the floor, the thought crossing his pain fogged mind that obviously there were no tables and chairs on this part of the floor so that you couldn't hurt yourself as you thrashed about in agony. He gasped as the spell was released. “I didn't know. I didn't know. I didn't know.”

“Very well.” Thomas sat down and stared at Rupert. “Clean up your mess and get out of my sight. If you fail me again, there won't be any second chances. I want to know about the stone that accompanied the Cartouches.”

Rupert collapsed as he tried to get up, before managing to eventually get to his knees. Pulling out his wand he vanished the vomit that surrounded him before dragging himself out of the room. The apparition point had never seemed so far away as he held onto the wall and furniture to help him get there. Eventually, however, he found himself in the small room, where he gave himself a few minutes to recover before apparating directly into his bathroom.

Opening up the cabinet that was on the wall, he pulled out a painkilling potion, his hands shaking as he tried to take off the top from the vial. Slowing down, he eventually managed to open it and swallow the contents. Sighing loudly with relief, Rupert then collapsed onto the floor. “Bastard.”

After ten minutes, Rupert shakily got to his feet and slowly walked through to his bedroom and into his study. After unwarding the safe he had in the wall, he withdrew the notes he'd made and looked at them. He knew all about the stone that had accompanied the Cartouches, and he had the feeling that Thomas knew that as well. As much as Rupert had been willing to aid Thomas in return for gaining him a magical body, a small part of him had balked at handing over the final piece in the puzzle to a man who could bring an end to the world as he knew it. Replacing the notes, Rupert locked and re-warded the safe before heading into his bathroom to shower.

Next Chapter: Cassandra runs the gauntlet; another wedding;
Thomas goes in search of bait.

Chapter 30: Making the Grade

August 21st 2004

Tonks was glad that she was finally able to leave the ballroom, James walking by her side. "I thought Katherine and Orion were never going to leave for their honeymoon."

James knew what was up with his girlfriend. "You want to get out of that bridesmaid's dress, don't you?"

"You can come help me if you want to." Tonks said in a teasing voice.

"I'll walk you to your door." James offered.

Tonks went to say something in response but other guests in the corridor where the elevator was situated put a stop to it. "We'll talk upstairs."

James quietly trailed Tonks to her room, following her in when she unlocked the door, and stood to one side. "What do you want to talk about?"

Tonks grabbed her robe. "I'll be out in a minute; we'll talk then."

James went out to the balcony and waited. Eventually Tonks came out and James pushed a glass towards her. "I poured you a glass of wine."

"Thank you." Tonks sat down, erected a privacy bubble, and got straight to the point. "James, why won't you sleep with me?"

"You want the flat out truth?" James knew that Tonks wouldn't like it if he told her.

Tonks took a mouthful of the wine before responding. "I do."

James ran his hand through his hair before answering. "Nymie, I like you a lot but I don't like the way you try and bring sex into the conversation every time we're alone." Tonks went to interrupt but James gave her a stern look. "Let me finish." Tonks subsided. "I'd like to think that we have a pretty good chance of making this somewhat strange relationship work but I'm beginning to get fed up of dealing with your not so subtle innuendos. I'm not a young man in my twenties, and I can't condone the free and easy sexual behavior you've displayed with your previous boyfriends who are."

Tonks did interrupt then. "It's not really any of your business how I behaved before we started going out, James."

James disagreed. "In a way it is my business because you're trying to force the same type of behavior onto me, and it just won't work. When, no, if, we make love, I want it to be because we both feel something more for each other than just the need to scratch an itch. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?"

"Yes." Tonks answered somewhat reluctantly. "But it's been four weeks, James."

"It wouldn't matter if it had been four months, Nymie." James sighed. "Until I feel ready to take that next step, it won't happen, no matter how much you push me."

Tonks knew that if she pushed James too hard, then he'd probably end the relationship; something she didn't want to do. "So what do you suggest?"

"That you stop trying to force the sexual issue." James said what he needed to before trying to find out how Tonks really felt about things. "Lack of sex aside, are you happy with the relationship?"

Tonks had never really been forced to evaluate a relationship before, except with Harry. "I'd like to think we get along well. We have a shared interest in teaching, you surprisingly like a lot of things I do, and you're probably one of the most interesting people I've ever talked to."

“And the negatives?” James wanted Tonks to consider those as well.

“You won’t sleep with me.” Tonks felt it only fair to include that. “You’re too old-fashioned, your fashion sense stinks, you won’t call me Tonks, and you overanalyze everything.”

“That’s a fair assessment.” James agreed with Tonks, before working through all of the points she’d mentioned, except for the one about his failure to sleep with her. “I’m always going to be old-fashioned, Nymie. I believe in holding doors open for ladies, yes Nymie, even you, just as much as I believe I should pay if we go out to dinner. As for my apparent lack of fashion sense, if it bothers you that much, I’m willing to let you give me some pointers if you really feel you must.”

Tonks couldn’t say anything that night about James’ clothes as he was dressed in a very smart outfit that matched the rest of the wedding party’s outfits. “I do but I promise I won’t go too overboard.”

“Thank you.” James wasn’t about to wear some of the things he’d seen Tonks’ Muggle friends wearing no matter what his girlfriend said. “Now for your other points; I’m never going to call you Tonks, so you’ll just have to make do with Nymie. And as to overanalyzing things, you’re right, I probably do but my job has something to do with that as does the failure of my marriage.”

James had never mentioned his marriage before, and Tonks had steered clear of bringing it up until now. “Speaking of your former marriage, Lily didn’t seem very happy to find out you were seeing me. As I walked by her and Katherine this evening, I overheard what I can only assume was a deliberate comment about you being a desperate old man trying to recapture his twisted youth, and trying to do it right this time, before Katherine told Lily to shut up in no uncertain terms.”

James wasn’t surprised by Lily’s comment. “I don’t know if you know but things between Lily and I aren’t exactly what you’d call civil.”

"I noticed." Tonks remarked tartly. "And, yes, like most people, I'm aware that you two don't exactly get along. However, I was surprised that Katherine was so rude to Lily before she stormed off. So would you care to share?"

James shook his head. "Not right now. But should things reach a stage where you should know, then I promise I'll explain."

Tonks had to respect James' boundaries. "I understand. So tell me, apart from my obsession with sex, what are my negatives?"

"You don't have any." James said simply.

"I must have some." Tonks argued.

"My old-fashioned virtues mean that I'd never say if you had." James couldn't resist teasing.

Tonks pouted slightly. "I told you when you asked about yours."

James acknowledged that fact. "You did but you didn't have to tell me."

"I thought you preferred honesty." Tonks reminded him.

James stopped teasing. "Okay then, but I can guarantee you won't like it."

"That might be so, but I can't change anything if you don't tell me what annoys you." Tonks stated logically.

James thought for a moment. "You're really not going to like it."

"James!" Tonks snapped. "Just tell me for goodness sake."

James responded in a very blunt manner. "Alright then. I hate to say it, Nymie, but outside of work you dress like a hooker, you drink too much, and your language can sometimes put a sailor to shame."

Tonks almost wished she'd kept quiet but knowing that she'd ask for his honesty, she responded in the same way James had to her flaws. "I can tone down the way I dress when I'm out with you but when you're not there, then I will dress to suit me. I like drinking but again, when I'm out with you, I'll moderate what I drink, and finally I'll try and watch my mouth but I'm not promising."

"That seems fair to me." James took Tonks' hand. "Nymie, now we've gotten the horrid parts out of the way, let's focus on the good things."

Tonks lifted an eyebrow. "I'm waiting."

James smiled. "There's a lot of nice things I could say about you, but I'll just pick a few. Nymie, you have a generous nature, you're intelligent even though you pretend not to be sometimes, you're funny, and I like spending time with you."

Tonks was more than a little surprised to find that she really cared what James thought about her; normally she would have just finished with someone if they'd pointed out her less attractive attributes as James just had. His willingness to want to look beyond the less desirable traits she possessed and focus on her nicer features, made Tonks feel warm inside. She therefore thought it best to return the favor. "Seeing as you've told me what is good about me, then I should do the same for you."

James felt a little uncomfortable to be on the receiving end but he was also more than a little curious as to what Tonks really thought of him. "If you must."

"I must." Tonks could see that James was almost squirming in his seat. "Now where to start? Hmm, let me see."

James couldn't blame Tonks for teasing him. "Nymie!"

"Okay, okay. I know I called you old-fashioned but if I'm being honest, I like that you open doors for me but I do wish you'd let me pay for a meal every now and then. What else?" Tonks grinned widely as she pretended to think. "I know. I like the way you run your hand through

your hair when something is bothering you; the rumpled looks suits you. I love listening to your stories about Hogwarts and the tricks you played; your face lights up when you talk about it, and it makes you look so much more approachable. But most importantly, I like spending so much time with you." Tonks sighed. "So it's going to be strange when we have to go back to work. I've gotten used to being able to see you whenever I want to."

"Likewise." James had seen Tonks almost every day since they'd first had lunch. He then told her something about the first time he'd asked her out. "Do you know that I almost backed out of that first lunch with you?"

"I thought about it but I figured it was just a lunch." Tonks admitted to the same idea. She'd therefore been surprised when, after a slightly stilted start, the two had found a great deal of common ground, and had ended up spending the rest of the day together, including going out to dinner that evening as well. "I'm glad I didn't." Tonks yawned.

"I'm glad you didn't as well." James stood up. "Nymie, I can see you're tired, and it's getting late, so I'm going to kiss you goodnight, and go back to my room."

Tonks got up as well, and slipped into James arms before closing her eyes and letting him kiss her. When he released her, she reluctantly bid him goodnight. "I'll see you for breakfast."

"Sorry, I thought I'd told you; I won't be there." James apologized. "I've a breakfast meeting with Albus to get him to sign off on the budget for the school year. It's going to be good to have things finally sorted before I have to go back."

"And I expect you're glad that Katherine agreed to sign up for another year." Tonks knew that James had been concerned about finding someone to replace her.

"I am." James liked working with his daughter. "To say nothing of Orion agreeing to take over from Cassandra. His exam results were

exceptional; obviously not as good as Cassandra's but finishing first in almost everything is nothing to be sneezed at."

Tonks had been stunned to find out that Orion had been slacking at school. "Orion's lucky that Uncle Sirius didn't string him up for not doing better during his whole school career. Leaving it until the final exams to prove that you're a lot cleverer than you make out wasn't exactly one of Orion's better moves."

"I doubt very much that Orion will ever do anything like that again." James was well aware that despite his exam results, Orion had received yet another dressing down from Sirius for not doing something he should have been doing since year one. James thought that that was why Orion had agreed to the assistant's position, rather than taking a year off while he tried to decide what it was he wanted to do now that he'd left school. "I think the experience of serving as an assistant to the new Defense teacher will do Orion good."

Tonks noticed that James didn't state who the new Defense teacher was. "You still haven't told me who you've gotten to replace Harry."

"Kingsley Shacklebolt." James had been at his wits' end to find someone until Kingsley had come forward. It had turned out that Kingsley's wife, a former auror, was pregnant, and she didn't want him risking life and limb now that he was going to be a father. James couldn't see Kingsley staying forever but he hoped he would. "I think he's going to be a lot stricter than Harry though. I think that sometimes Harry was something of a soft touch."

"I doubt that. Cassandra said that you should see Harry at the Academy; apparently he's quite the tyrant." Tonks had found it difficult to believe her cousin knowing Harry as well as she did.

"I think she's exaggerating." James laughed, not realizing that Cassandra was telling the truth. "I've been invited to see Cassandra take the final obstacle test next week together with Remus; Harry is overseeing it so I might get to see him in action then."

“That’s not fair.” Tonks pouted. “Uncle Sirius refused to let me watch.”

“It’s only going to happen if one of the trainees fails.” James reminded Tonks. “I’ll ask Sirius for you but I doubt he’ll let you attend. I’m attending in my capacity as headmaster, and Remus as head of the Watchers Council as well as Cassandra’s former defense teacher.”

“You know very well that that’s just Uncle Sirius’ way of bending the rules that no outsiders can witness the tests.” Tonks was pissed. “Don’t bother asking for me; I’m going to demand Uncle Sirius lets me watch. Cassandra is my cousin.”

“I wouldn’t hold your breath.” James kissed Tonks on the cheek. “I really must be off now. I’ll see you on Tuesday morning. And don’t forget to wear sturdy shoes. We’re going for a walk.”

“I will.” Tonks hated walking but wanting to spend time with James, had acquiesced to his request that they take a stroll in the Lake District. “Goodnight, James.”

“Night, Nymie.” James vanished.

August 23rd 2004

Cassandra stood at the entranceway to the testing facility. “I’m ready.”

Harry opened the door. “Remember. You have thirty minutes to complete the course.”

Cassandra held her wand out and stepped into the room to be instantly met by darkness. Casting a spell to light the way in front of her, Cassandra was glad she did. Barely an inch from her feet was a large mess which looked a lot like quicksand.

Lifting her wand higher, Cassandra saw that the ground appeared solid a few feet in front of her. Casting a spell on the quicksand to

harden it, Cassandra put a tentative foot forward only to feel a sucking motion. Knowing that she'd have to find some other way, she pulled out several hairs from her head, and transfigured them into a small pebble. Casting the pebble in front of her, she smiled to herself as it sank in what had appeared to be solid ground. Repeating the operation several times, Cassandra eventually found hardened ground about four feet in front of her. Cassandra took a deep breath and leapt forward, wobbling slightly as she landed on firm ground. She then continued on to the next part of the course.

Harry, Sirius, Remus and James were watching her from a room that overlooked the entire course, the six trainees who'd just qualified standing behind them. One of them, Julianne Solace, addressed Harry. "Sir, it's rumored that Cassandra's only had eight months' training. We asked her but she said that she wasn't allowed to discuss it. So is it true?"

Harry confirmed the rumor. "It is. She successfully completed all the reading and every single one of the Auror academic examinations in five months that you lot took over the space of three years. However her physical training was spread out over the eight months."

Julianne had another question. "May I ask something else, Sir?"

"Feel free." Harry glanced over at Julianne before returning his attention to Cassandra.

"Valdez said that Cassandra's not going to be an Auror even though she's completed everything." Julianne ignored Valdez' annoyed look that she'd told Harry. "So why is she doing the course?"

"You'll have to ask Cassandra yourself." Harry informed her.

Julianne decided to do so once Cassandra finished. "Thank you, Sir."

Sirius watched worriedly as Cassandra ducked flames that came spurting out of a small dragon that stood in her way. "I knew I shouldn't have let you set up the course, Sebastian."

Remus spoke up before Harry could. "You'd have made it too easy, Sirius."

Sirius continued watching as Cassandra use a hypnotic spell on the dragon. "I hope she can sustain that."

Cassandra could feel sweat running down her back as she slowly slipped by the dragon. Just as she thought she was free and clear, a roar sounded and flames licked out, catching her on the shoulder.

As Sirius heard his daughter cry out, he went to walk towards the door. "I'm stopping it."

Remus grabbed Sirius' arm. "She can do this, Sirius. She'll kill you if you interfere after all the hard work she's put in to get this far."

After glaring at the trainees who were now looking at him rather than at Cassandra, Sirius reluctantly returned to his original spot.

Trying to ignore the painful sensation of her burnt back, Cassandra cast a conjunctivitis curse and hurried forward, hoping it would be enough to stop the dragon from following her. In pain it bellowed and spat out more flames which Cassandra ducked before it turned the other way. Cassandra pushed on.

In the room, Sirius let out a sigh of relief. "I thought she was in trouble then."

"She's got a few surprises left still." Harry watched as Cassandra easily dealt with the enormous snake he'd left for her.

Martin Tibbett watched the dark-haired girl as she stood in front of the wall that constituted the next part of the course. "I'll be astonished if she gets past this."

Harry snorted. "Tibbett, you're looking at someone who beat everyone's scores here for mental agility every single time, so I suggest you shut up, and continue watching."

"Yes, Sir." Tibbett simmered down.

Cassandra looked at the wall which had been divided into 36 blocks of equal size with five different types of symbols unevenly divided among the blocks. Counting up how many spades, the first symbol, there were, Cassandra found five; the next one was hearts of which there were six. Cassandra then ascertained that the wall had eleven clubs, six squares and seven diamonds on it, leaving one empty square. Sitting on a ledge at the side of the wall were five blocks each depicting one of the symbols. Cassandra easily worked out that she had to figure out which symbol belonged in the empty block. Wording above the wall told her she had only once chance to get it right.

Martin smiled smugly to himself as time ticked by; after five minutes Cassandra still hadn't figured it out. "She's not going to be able to do it."

Cassandra was beginning to panic as she realized that she was going to run out of time if she didn't make a decision soon. Picking up a diamond, she went to place it in the wall. James, who'd worked the answer out almost immediately, frowned. "Don't do it, Cassandra."

Cassandra hesitated, almost as if she'd heard James. "Stupid, stupid, stupid. I'm so stupid." Cassandra put the diamond back down, and picked up a club and, after inverting it, placed it into the gap. The wall slid smoothly away.

Martin looked disappointed. "I thought she'd fail."

"Tough break, Tibbett." Harry's heart had been in his mouth as he'd watch Cassandra about to make a mistake that would have cost her the chance to at least consider taking the final step after this to become a fully qualified Auror.

"Three more tests and she's through." Sirius blanched as the largest acromantula he'd ever seen burst into life in Cassandra's path. "If she's hurt, I'll swear I'll kill you Sebastian."

Harry ignored Sirius' outburst, and turned to the trainees who were trying to hide their smiles at Sirius' words. "Just be glad I didn't put this in your paths."

“I thought she was supposed to be your friend.” Emily Bishop felt her heart beating faster as she watched Cassandra throw spell after spell at the enormous spider, and all to no avail.

“She is, Bishop.” Harry had discovered that the spell that could be used to repel acromantulas didn't exist in this world, making Cassandra's job much harder. “And that's two days of cleaning duty for failing to address me as ‘Sir’.”

Emily scowled but said nothing. James began to wonder if what Tonks had told him Cassandra had said about Harry had been right after all.

Cassandra let out a yelp as one of the spider's barbed legs caught her arm. “Why won't you just back off?”

The acromantula laughed. “Because you're my next meal.”

Cassandra wished she'd been able to cast the killing curse right then but it was banned from the test; the use of it would mean an immediate failure. “Dream on.”

As the acromantula surged forward, Cassandra severed one of its legs. She was horrified to watch it grow back. “I'm going to kill Harry when I get out of here.”

In the room, the trainees tittered at Cassandra's remark. Harry span round. “I wouldn't laugh too loudly if I were you. You might want to remember that despite the fact you've all just passed, your acceptance is still probationary. Too many mistakes in the field and you'll be right back here again, and I can promise you that I won't make the test quite as easy next time.”

Sirius hid his smirk as the trainees all fell silent, none of them daring to meet Harry's eyes. “And I'll second Harry's comments. You might also want to remember that it's my daughter in there.”

Mumbled apologies filled the room. James hid his own smile as he acknowledged to himself that Harry was, indeed, a totally different entity in his position as an Auror.

Harry scowled at all of the trainees before turning back round just in time to see Cassandra cast a spell that bested the spider. "Lentescio Cassetes."

A large net settled over the acromantula and stuck to it like glue, ensnaring it as it tried to move until eventually it fell to the ground. Cassandra let out a sigh of relief. "It looks as if you'll be going hungry today."

Not able to move its mouth, the acromantula didn't respond and Cassandra carefully skirted around it. As she rounded a corner she found a door in her way. "Harry said seven tests, so this can't be the end."

Holding her wand in front of her, Cassandra cast several spells before casting an opening spell at the door; she paled as it opened, and a gold masked man stepped out to meet her. "Oh Merlin."

In the room above the course, Harry swore, and glanced at Sirius. "I thought her biggest fear was bats."

"It's obviously changed." Sirius felt nervous as he watched Cassandra back away. "Come on, Cassie. Think."

Unaware of exactly who Dominus was, most of the trainees wondered why Cassandra would be so frightened of a gold masked man. Martin couldn't resist making a comment in a very quiet voice to the girl standing next to him. "Looks like Sebastian's protégée isn't quite as brilliant as he makes out. That'll teach the cocky bastard."

Remus' head swung round as he'd heard the comment, and despite his lack of authority in Auror Division, still took the young man to task. "Would you care to repeat that for the rest of the room?"

At the same time as Remus spoke up, Simon Valdez, who'd been standing to the other side of Martin, had also caught some of it, and he'd pulled out his wand. "Take that back, Tibbett."

"Valdez stand down." Harry, who'd hadn't appeared to have heard, addressed the two young men. "Tibbett, report to Auror Moody. Tell him you're on cleaning duty for two weeks. Valdez, you're on desk duty for a week."

Valdez lowered his wand and apologized but Tibbett wasn't taking his punishment quietly. "What for? I'm allowed to express my opinion about Black."

"That maybe so, but being insolent about a superior while he's still in the room isn't exactly one of your brightest ideas." Harry hadn't liked the trainee since he'd first met him three months ago. "Now get out before I make it a month, or better yet, bust you back down to first year trainee."

Martin stupidly stood there. "How did you hear me?"

The girl who he'd whispered to didn't particularly like Martin either. "Have you never heard of an eavesdropping spell, Martin? How else do you think Auror Sebastian and Mr. Lupin heard?"

Harry was aware that Martin had been pursuing Julianne for quite some time, and denigrating Harry had obviously been his way of showing off. "Now that Solace has successfully answered your question, I suggest you report to Auror Moody. Only this time tell him you're on cleaning duty for two months. If you don't like that option then you're free to report in with the other first year trainees when they begin in September."

Not daring to push his luck any further, Martin stormed out of the room. James and Remus exchanged a look as Harry turned his attention back to Cassandra, who was currently engaged in a duel with the man in front of her. "She hasn't figured it out yet?"

Sirius shook his head. "I think fear is driving her, and not logic. She's defending rather than attacking. She's never going to work it out if she doesn't strike back."

It was only when Cassandra finally did what Sirius hoped she would, and hit the man in the shoulder with a Reducto spell, that she realized something wasn't quite right. "There's no way I should be able to do that."

Harry watched as Cassandra swore out loud as she finally worked out what she was facing. "Riddikulus." The boggart changed into a decrepit, bent over old man who grabbed his back in pain. Cassandra took aim again. "Riddikulus." With a loud crack the boggart vanished, and Cassandra stood still for a moment, trying to quell the shaking that was wracking her body.

Sirius checked the time. "She's got four minutes left."

Cassandra pushed on through the door to find herself face to face with a sphinx. "Oh joy. This is all I need."

The sphinx rose up. "Answer my riddle and you may pass."

Remus had seen H.J.'s memory of the Triwizard Tournament and immediately knew where Harry had gotten the idea from. "Sneaky, Harry."

Harry shrugged. "I wouldn't be me if I didn't use something like this."

"Harry, it will attack her, if she gets it wrong." Sirius reminded his number one.

"She won't get it wrong, and if she does, her portkey will operate and get her out." Harry reminded Sirius, whose own fear for his daughter was now outweighing his logic. Harry lowered his voice so that only Sirius could hear. "All of the trainees faced this, and all of them passed. You know that Cassandra is better than all of them; she can do this."

Sirius let out a deep breath. "You're right."

Down on the course, Cassandra accepted the challenge. "Tell me your riddle."

The sphinx sat back down.

'It's more powerful than God.
It's more evil than the devil.
The poor have it.
The rich need it.
If you eat only it, you'll die.
What is it?'

Cassandra scratched her head. "Now God's that Muggle thing. I know that from that Jim Carrey movie."

Four of the trainees looked at each other in confusion as none of them, except for Solace who was the only half blood there, understood what Cassandra was going on about.

Down below, the sphinx began to rise up again. "Is that your answer?"

"No." Cassandra responded hurriedly. "I'm thinking out loud. I'll tell you when I have an answer."

Disappointed, the sphinx sat back down again.

Cassandra went over the riddle. "The rich don't need money, and the poor definitely don't have any, so it can't be that. It can't be life or death. And it can't be food despite the sentence about eating."

Harry glanced at the misty clock that said Cassandra had forty-five seconds left. "Come on, Cassandra, come on."

Cassandra snapped her fingers. "I have an answer."

“What is it?” The sphinx held itself poised ready to attack if she got it wrong.

“It’s nothing.” Cassandra gave a yip of delight as the sphinx bowed its head and stepped aside. Cassandra bolted forward knowing that the door labelled exit was the way out, only to hesitate before casting a revealing spell. The door glowed red and Cassandra hurriedly cast another spell which determined that Harry had placed a sleeping spell on the entire door. “He lied to me; there were eight tests.” Dispersing the spell, Cassandra used her wand to open the door and stepped out of the room to find herself up in the room where Harry and the others had been watching.

Harry was waiting at the door for her. “You had three seconds left.”

Cassandra hadn’t realized how close it had been. “That last spell was sneaky.” She let out a sigh of relief as the Healer, who Sirius had sent one of the trainees to get, applied a numbing spell on the area the dragon had caught, before placing burns salve over her burnt skin.

“Two of the trainees are re-sitting their final year because of that spell.” Harry informed her. “These are five of the six trainees who, like you, managed to get through the course.”

The five who'd already met Cassandra before, greeted her cheerfully, with Julianne Solace taking point for the group. She asked Cassandra the same question she'd asked Harry. “Valdez said that you're not going to be an Auror, so you didn't even have to do that course. I was therefore wondering why you did it.”

“Because I'm going to be working in a high risk area, and I need to be able to defend myself.” Cassandra couldn't tell Julianne the real reason she'd begun the training. “As well as that, I also didn't want anyone to say that I'd only gotten the job based on the fact that my Dad is Commander Black. And I wanted to have some sort of qualification to show that I've earned my position.”

Julianne smiled. “I think you've proved that. But I can't believe you've done all these exams and tests and you're not going to be an Auror.”

"That wasn't my goal." Cassandra rotated her shoulder, glad that the numbing spell had taken away the pain.

"Is Cassandra now allowed to discuss her training, Sir?" This time Julianne directed her question to Harry instead of Cassandra.

"She may." Harry wondered why she'd asked. He soon found out.

"How did you do under the Cruciatus and the Imperius?" Julianne had almost dropped out of the course when she found she'd have to undergo them, particularly as she'd thought that all of the worst training had been over. She was therefore curious to see how Cassandra, who was rumored to have got some of the highest test scores ever, had fared against Harry in something a little less cerebral.

"I haven't undergone those tests, and I have no intention of doing so." Cassandra smiled tightly. "Which is one of the reasons why I'm not going to become a fully qualified Auror."

Julianne hadn't realized. "It would be silly to waste everything you've just done. I admit the Cruciatus hurts like nothing I've ever felt before but it's over fairly quickly. I think you're mad if you don't take that final step."

Valdez stepped in. "I think harassing Cassandra isn't going to make her change her mind, Solace."

Harry also interrupted. "Valdez, I think it's up to Cassandra as to what she does, so I suggest you shut up and let her make up her own mind, as should you, Solace."

Neither recruit wanted to end up on cleaning duty with Tibbett and Bishop, and so they duly shut up. "Yes, Sir."

Remus, however, didn't have to worry about cleaning duty, and he led his god-daughter to one side, and put up a privacy bubble so that the others couldn't hear him. "Cassandra, you've wanted to be an

Auror since you first understood what it meant. I know the thought of undergoing the Cruciatus frightens you after what happened to Sirius, and quite rightly so. But Solace is right, Cassandra. It would be a waste to throw it all away just for the sake of what probably won't be more than a minute's pain."

Cassandra knew that Remus was right, and if anyone understood pain it would be him. "Uncle Remus, how do you deal with the pain from your transformation?"

"It's not that bad now that I take a potion but before then I used to dread the full moon. Nothing could stop the pain, not even dreamless sleep." Remus answered honestly. "But I had little choice; I just had to put up with it. It's terrible while it's happening, but you soon get it over it."

Cassandra felt cowardly in comparison to Remus, particularly in light of the fact that she'd only have to suffer such pain once, rather than having to face up to it every month. "I think I need to talk to Harry."

Beckoned by Remus, Harry went over to where Cassandra and Remus were standing, stepping into the bubble. "What is it?"

"I think I'm going to take the final tests." Cassandra said in a shaky voice. "Uncle Remus agrees with Solace that it would be a waste if I didn't. He also pointed out that the memory of the pain would quickly fade."

"He's right." Harry confirmed, having gone through the same thing as Remus had. He didn't mention that this was what he had hoped for when he'd begun training Cassandra. "At the end of the day, it all comes down to how badly you want this."

"I do want this, Harry, but I'm afraid." Cassandra admitted. "After seeing Dad suffer like that, the thought of the Cruciatus scares me almost as much as Dominus does."

Harry could see Cassandra shaking but he was unable to offer her little comfort. "Cass, unfortunately as much as I want to, I can't make exception for you."

Cassandra glanced over at everyone else who was watching her, even though they couldn't hear what was being said. "Would I have to duel with you first like in the memories you showed me?"

Harry nodded. "Yes, but because your training is up to scratch, you'd have last for two minutes, and not twenty seconds. Whatever time is left on the clock is how long you get to go under the Cruciatus." Harry couldn't tell her that no matter how much time remained, her exposure would only last for twenty seconds maximum.

The temptation of having full Auror status, something she'd dreamed of as a young child, was almost too much for Cassandra, as frightened as she was. "When would I have to do it?"

"Not today." Harry assured her. "You're injured."

"Who else will be there?" Cassandra couldn't help her nerves.

"We have to have one witness." Harry knew that it couldn't be Sirius as he wouldn't be able to stand back if Cassandra didn't make it past the two minute mark, and Harry had to use the Cruciatus on her. Harry was also aware that as yet, not one of the trainees had gotten past the first minute. However, Cassandra had an advantage in that Harry wouldn't be able to use her fear to overpower her, and she, more than any of the other trainees, stood a chance of being able to stand up to him.

Cassandra looked hopefully at Remus. "Could you do it?"

Remus shook his head. "I can't Cassandra. I'm going to be in New York."

Harry dropped the privacy bubble, and walked over to Sirius. "She's considering taking the final tests but if she does, then we'll need a witness."

Valdez stepped forward. "I'll do it, Sir."

Harry shook his head. "You're dating her, Valdez."

Valdez stepped back as Julianne took his place. "In that case, I'll do it, Sir."

Harry nodded. "Thank you, Solace."

"I can think about it?" Cassandra didn't want to say yes, and then back out.

"You've got until Friday." Harry knew that he couldn't offer more than that, particularly in light of what the others had gone through.

"I'll tell you by Friday morning, Sir." Cassandra promised. "Am I free to go to back to my desk, Sir?"

Harry shook his head. "As you're injured, go home. I'll expect to see you in the morning though as usual."

Sirius dismissed the trainees. "You lot get out of here. I'm sure you've got some celebrating to do. As a reward, you've all got tomorrow off."

Edward Travers had a question. "Does that include Tibbett, Sir?"

"No." Sirius wasn't going to let the mouthy trainee off. "When you return on Wednesday, you'll be given your assignments."

The three girls headed out of the door, quite unaware that Harry could hear them discussing who their assigned mentors would be while they were still going up the corridor. Emily Bishop was grinning as she chatted to Julianne, and the other female Auror, Tanya Goodrich. "I hope I get Auror Collins."

Julianne glanced back up the corridor. "I'd like Auror Sebastian."

Tanya snorted. "That's only because you fancy him. I'd prefer the big boss. He can mentor me any way he wants to."

Julianne laughed. "In your dreams. Everyone knows that Commander Black doesn't take Auror interns, but I guess he might make an exception if his daughter gets through the last test."

The girls' voices faded as they entered the elevator and the doors closed. Harry grinned at Sirius. "I think Goodrich has a thing for you. She just mentioned..."

Sirius interrupted Harry. "Eavesdropping, and then repeating other people's private conversations isn't exactly polite, Sebastian."

Harry winced, as he knew that there were boundaries even he had to maintain, and he'd unthinkingly just overstepped them. "Sorry, Sir."

James and Remus both hid their smiles, Remus coughing to hide a laugh as he too had overheard the girl's comment. Sirius glared at Remus before turning to Cassandra. "As it was Sebastian's foolhardy course that put you in this condition, he's going to take you home now."

Knowing he'd been effectively dismissed, Harry held out his arm. "I'll apparate us from here."

Cassandra wished she could apparate directly but not having Harry's clearance she couldn't. "Thanks."

As the pair vanished, Sirius let out a long breath and sat down heavily. "I thought I was going to have a heart attack watching that."

James commiserated with his friend. "You're not alone. It wasn't easy to watch."

Remus agreed. "I had to reign in my natural instincts to push everyone out of the way and go rescue her. I wanted to punch Harry when that dragon burnt her."

"But you stopped me from ending it." Sirius pointed out.

"I wasn't going to let you blow it for her." Remus had hated watching Cassandra go through the testing; he was glad that he'd legitimately been able to refuse her request to witness the tests on Friday if she went ahead with them.

"I actually think Harry would have stepped in if you hadn't." Sirius theorized. "He's put a lot of time and effort into training Cassie."

"You certainly keep him in his place, don't you?" Remus was smiling as he said it. "He's right you know, Goodrich really does have a thing for you. I believe her exact words were 'he can mentor me any way he wants to'."

Sirius scowled at his friend. "It's a pity I can't shut you up as easily as Harry."

James laughed. "I've never seen Harry back off off like that before. Then again, I've never seen this side of Harry."

"Harry overstepped the mark." Sirius wasn't going to apologize for berating his subordinate. "However, unlike the trainees, I'm not about to send him off to do cleaning duty as he does with them. Harry knew that he'd made a mistake, and apologized immediately which is good enough for me."

"Is Harry really as mean as he appears to be?" James had to know, as like Tonks, he had thought that Cassandra had been joking.

"He's worse." Sirius admitted. "In the short time that he's taken over the training, he's gained a reputation of being someone you don't want to cross. It certainly keeps the trainees on their toes."

"Tibbett didn't seem to mind taking a chance." Remus remarked.

"He's pissed because his twin failed today." Sirius informed Remus, who hadn't seen the trainees test out.

"To be honest I thought that the course would be harder." Remus observed.

“Harry actually made the course easier for the trainees than it has been in the past but cut the time limit down by ten minutes. Even though you think the course was easy, Harry made the course harder for Cassandra. The others faced off with a troll instead of an Acromantula which is decidedly more intelligent. I think Harry wanted to make sure that no-one could say that she'd been unfairly favored.” Sirius told Remus.

"Why make it easier though?" Remus didn't understand Harry's reasoning.

“We both agreed that every single trainee was deserving of an Auror position but some of them, like a lot of people, while performing well in practice and in the classroom, get overly nervous during tests.” Sirius explained. "Harry therefore decided to cut them some slack. And we need all the manpower we can get, particularly as we've got a team still out in France and after losing Bella's team to Dominus.”

“So if you need men, why did Harry pull the door handle trick?” James asked. "Why not, just simply let everyone pass?”

“Because I told him to do it.” Sirius grinned. “Look at how many unsuspecting Slytherins we caught out with that trick during school.”

“But this is Auror Division, Sirius, not school.” James reminded him.

Sirius had good reason not to let everyone pass. “That might be so, but you need to be as alert and expectant of a trap as you are of an attack, something the Slytherins learnt well enough after repeated exposure but the two trainees didn't. It certainly wasn't the first time they've been exposed to this sort of thing.”

“I have to admit to feeling sorry for them.” Remus admitted. "Then again, I'm quite sure I'd have passed the tests, so I suppose I shouldn't feel too badly for them.”

"They'll be given the chance to resit the test next year." Sirius informed his friend. "And you would have passed because you have something the trainees don't."

Remus opened the door. "I take it you're referring to the fact that the 'big boss' is my best friend, and I know all of his tricks."

Sirius barked out a laugh. "Something like that. Or it could be that you'd have found a way to rig the course to your advantage, just like you did at school."

James shook his head as he followed his two friends out. "I swear you two never grow up."

Sirius snorted. "Says the one of the four biggest troublemakers Hogwarts has ever known."

"I grew up." James retorted.

"I find that hard to believe from the man who helped his daughter smuggle in contraband during her second year..." Remus reminded him as they walked up the corridor. "...just so that she could use it in my classroom to turn my hair silver and green."

"It was Sirius' idea." James defended himself, even as he laughed at the memory.

"You could have said no." Sirius argued.

"I could have." James admitted. "But where would the fun have been in that?"

All three men burst out laughing as they entered the elevator and the doors closed behind them.

27th August 2004

Cassandra felt sick as she faced Harry. "I'm ready."

Harry had already explained the rules to her, in exactly the same manner as she'd seen him do it in his memory. "On my mark."

As soon as Harry reached three, Cassandra threw up a shield, and sent a powerful Reducto curse flying at Harry's leg.

Harry leapt into the air to avoid it while sending the same curse back at her.

Cassandra let her shield absorb it as she fired off a blasting curse, feeling gratified as she watched Harry take a step backwards as it impacted his shield. She then decided to try a spell she'd been practicing alone. "Tempestas Imber."

Harry found himself in the middle of a storm, the rain pelting hard down his face as lightning flashed above his head, the thunder from the storm almost deafening him. "Exaresco." As the storm dried up, and his vision cleared, a spell hit Harry squarely in the face. Unable to hear over the thunder, even with his hearing, he hadn't heard Cassandra call out a temporary blindness spell. Harry swore loudly. "Shit."

"Reducto." Cassandra pressed her advantage, and scowled as Harry, who used his newly restored hearing to his advantage, correctly estimated where the spell was coming from, before returning fire.

"Posterno." Harry called out, listening to try and determine whether Cassandra had hit the ground.

Cassandra hit the floor deliberately, hoping to catch Harry out. She held off firing until Harry had aimed a stupefy spell in her direction before rolling over and taking aim at him again. "Exulcero Corium."

Harry shielded against the spell that would have made his skin feel irritated and itchy enough to distract him, before using the threefold spell he favored. "Reducto, Stupefy, Expelliarmus."

Cassandra couldn't hear the softly whispered spells, and, as Harry expected her to, dealt swiftly with the first two, before her wand flew out of her hand. She still wasn't ready to give up, and diving forward, tried to grab it.

"Accio wand." Harry called out.

Cassandra glanced at the clock and gulped. "Seven seconds to go."

Harry turned his wand on himself and restored his eyesight. "Resero Visum. You did well."

"But it wasn't good enough." Cassandra admitted as she took her wand back and reholstered it.

Harry wasn't looking forward to this part. "This will be over quite quickly, so try and relax as if you can."

"I thought you usually told people to grit their teeth." Cassandra's voice shook even as she tried to be sarcastic.

"Relaxing makes it a little more bearable." Harry knew though that it would be nigh on impossible for Cassandra to do so as it took practice.

Cassandra sat on the floor. "I'm ready, Sir."

Harry couldn't help but smile grimly. "Only you and Solace thought of doing that."

"Why make it any more painful than it's already going to be?" Cassandra closed her eyes and waited.

Harry held out his wand, his hand shaking as he got ready to do it. "Crucio."

To Cassandra it felt like the longest seven seconds of her life as she tried not to scream as pain ripped through her, and failed.

As soon as the bell rang, Harry dropped the spell. "Black, are you alright?"

Julianne was surprised to hear that the voice of the toughest instructor she'd had for the duration of her course sounded unsteady.

"I'd answer properly if I hadn't bit through my tongue, Thir." Cassandra lisped her answer.

Harry raised his wand. "Episkey."

"Are you alright, Sir?" Cassandra had never seen Harry so pale before, so she was concerned. "You look terrible."

"Doing that to you ranks as one of the worst things I've ever had to do." Harry said quietly so that Solace wouldn't hear as he reached into his pocket and pulled out two potions. "Anti-cruciatius, and pain killer. The first one will help with the shakes."

Cassandra breathed a sigh of relief as the two potions she'd swiftly drunk took effect. "I hope never to go through that again."

"You don't have to." Harry lifted her to her feet. "Can you walk?"

"I feel better now I've taken the potions." Cassandra still felt wobbly though.

"I'm afraid now you have to pass the Imperius." Harry felt a little more comfortable administering this Unforgivable.

Even though she could have done with waiting a little longer, Cassandra just wanted to get it over and done with. "I'm ready, Sir."

"Imperio." Harry called out. "Cassandra, I want you to take out your wand and use the Reducto spell on me." Harry knew that even though she might not realize it, Cassandra would be angry at Harry's use of the Cruciatus on her, and her anger would make it harder for her to resist the spell.

Cassandra began to pull out her wand before visibly struggling with herself, and after a few moments, lowering it. Cassandra let out a long sigh as she threw off the remnants of the spell. "That wasn't funny, Harry."

"It wasn't meant to be, Black." Harry reminded Cassandra of her place. Normally he'd have let it go but with Solace there, he couldn't.

"Sorry, Sir." Cassandra hated calling Harry 'Sir'. "What happens now?"

"I'll sign off to say you've completed the course, and Commander Black will take my recommendation that you be granted an Auror position to the Minister to sign off on." Harry explained. "You should have full Auror status by the end of the day, but it's been noted on your file that you're not a field agent."

"Good." Cassandra wasn't willing to take another life. "I'd better get back to work, Sir."

"Solace is going to accompany you home, Black." Harry told her. "You're to take the rest of the day off."

Cassandra apparated Julianne to her home before bursting into tears of relief as she realized she'd actually done it. "Sorry."

Julianne put her arm around Cassandra and rubbed the girl's arm. "It's okay. I did exactly the same."

Cassandra sat down on the sofa. "How long did you have to undergo it?"

"The full twenty seconds." Julianne shivered and rubbed her arms.

Cassandra frowned. "The full twenty seconds?"

"I see Auror Sebastian didn't explain that to you." Julianne therefore did so. "He told each of us that the maximum would be twenty

seconds no matter how long we lasted as it wasn't being done as a form of punishment."

"He could have remembered to tell me that." Cassandra knew though that things wouldn't have gone any differently even if he had. "I don't know how I'd have managed if I'd had to go that long."

"I'm not sure how Auror Sebastian would have either." Julianne remarked. "He certainly didn't react in quite the same way to putting the curse on any of us as he did with you. He seemed pretty upset."

"That's probably because Harry's my best friend." Cassandra told the girl.

"Judging from the way he reacted, if I didn't know better I'd have thought that Auror Sebastian was dating you, and not Valdez." Julianne remarked as she got up to get Cassandra something to drink; she knew from her own experience that Cassandra's throat was probably quite dry from screaming despite the potions she'd taken. "So, if you don't mind me asking, is there more between you and Auror Sebastian than it seems?"

Cassandra shook her head. "No, you know very well I'm seeing Simon."

Julianne took two cans of soda out of the fridge. "Will this be alright?"

"That's fine. There are glasses in the cupboard to the right." Cassandra instructed her.

Julianne poured out the liquid into the glasses and returned to sit by Cassandra. "So is Auror Sebastian single?"

Cassandra nodded somewhat reluctantly. "As far as I'm aware. Do you mind if I ask why?"

"Because I'd like to ask him out for a drink." Julianne answered. "I couldn't before now, as he's been one of my instructors for the last

three months but now I'm qualified, and he's not my assigned mentor, I can."

Cassandra didn't tell Julianne that even though she wouldn't be holding a field commission, Harry had been assigned as Cassandra's mentor for the next six months. "So you're free to ask him out then."

Julianne grinned. "So what do you think about going out on a double date, if Auror Sebastian says yes?"

"I'm not sure if Harry would go for that but you can ask him." Even though she was seeing someone else, Cassandra found she didn't like the idea of having to watch Harry with someone else, and she hoped Harry would refuse.

"Great." Julianne walked back into the kitchen to place her glass into the sink. "I'd best get back. Will you be alright now?"

"She'll be fine, Solace." Sirius walked into the room from the hallway, a bottle of champagne in his hand. "Thank you for taking care of her."

"It's my pleasure, Sir." Julianne turned to Cassandra. "Cassandra."

"Thanks, Julianne." Cassandra watched the girl disappear before turning to her Dad. "So did Uncle Albus sign off on my position already?"

"No, that's why I brought champagne to celebrate." Sirius grinned at his daughter, and held out a leather wallet. "Your Auror's badge, Cassie."

Cassandra gave a whoop of joy, and jumped up to hug Sirius. "Thanks for the opportunity, Dad."

"You can thank Harry and the two trainees who didn't pass the final test." Sirius told her. "You've simply taken one of their spots, otherwise Harry wouldn't have been able to offer you the opportunity no matter how much he wanted to."

“I’m sorry they didn’t pass but I’m also glad I got the chance.” Cassandra felt less shaky now.

Sirius opened the champagne, and poured it into two glasses. “To my brilliant daughter.”

“I’ll second that.” Cassandra gave an impish giggle.

“Because of what Harry has done with you, Albus has decided to award three positions bi-annually for accelerated learning.” Sirius had already discussed it with Albus a few weeks earlier but hadn’t been about to tell Cassandra until she’d passed. “Alasdair will be mentoring the lucky three, which means he won’t be teaching at the Academy.”

Cassandra thought the choice of mentor was right. “So Harry is totally in charge of training now that Alasdair is doing that?”

“He is.” Sirius confirmed. “I feel sorry for the trainees.”

“Me too.” Cassandra grinned, and changed the subject. “So how is Faith feeling?”

“Grumpy.” Sirius admitted. “But at least this pregnancy was planned.”

“I bet poor Siri’s nose is going to be put out of joint when our new sister arrives.” Cassandra had been delighted when Sirius had announced two weeks ago that Faith was three months pregnant with a little girl. Craig had used a spell to stop Sirius from being able to have sons, something Sirius had been only too happy to undergo.

“He’ll love being her big brother.” Sirius sat down. “So tell me…”

The two then spent the rest of the day talking until Sirius disappeared home for dinner.

Cassandra had been about to have an early night when Harry suddenly appeared in her hallway. “I didn’t expect to see you today, Harry. Is something wrong?”

“No. I just wanted to give you these.” Harry pulled out a bag from his pocket and unshrunk it, before pulling out a large vase of lilies.

Cassandra gasped. “They’re beautiful. Are they for me?”

“Well, they’re not for me.” Harry put the vase down on a small side table before opening the bag again. “Champagne, chocolates and this.”

Cassandra was delighted when Harry pulled out another stuffed toy to add to her growing collection. “Perhaps I should get you to Crucio me every week.”

Harry’s face dropped, and he put down the gifts. “It’s not funny, Cass. It nearly killed me to do that to you. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Cassandra rushed over as Harry turned away, and wrapped her arms around his waist so that her face was against his back. “I’m so sorry, Harry. That was insensitive of me.”

Harry exhaled and turned around, so that Cassandra was held against his chest. “I’m sorry as well. I really hated having to do that to you.”

“And I made a joke of it.” Cassandra felt like a complete bitch. “I should have known better.”

Harry held her away from her him. “Yes, you should have.”

Cassandra looked down. “I’m truly sorry.”

“Cass, it’s okay.” Harry didn’t want to bring Cassandra down on such an important date for her. “You’re still my best friend.”

Cassandra cheered up a little. “And so I should be.” Cassandra stepped away to move the vase from the table where Harry had placed it, and into her bedroom. “Harry?”

Harry came to stand at the bedroom door. "Yes?"

"When we were duelling today, did you deliberately not restore your eyesight until afterwards?" Cassandra had wondered as she'd replayed the duel back in her head.

"Honestly, yes." Harry admitted. "I knew you'd last longer if I couldn't see."

"Don't you think that that was a little unfair?" Cassandra finished arranging the flowers before turning back to face Harry.

"Cass, I was barely able to hold the Cruciatus on you as it was, and I severely underpowered it." Harry said softly. "Would you rather I'd have given my all in the duel?"

"Yes, no, yes." Cassandra walked back out to the sitting room. "It just seems unfair that you did that for me, and not for the other trainees."

"Answer me this." Harry sat down. "What could you feel when I used the Cruciatus on you today? Did you feel scared, angry, sick?"

"I could only feel the pain." Cassandra gave a shiver. "It was as if there was nothing else but that. Those seven seconds felt like an eternity."

"Now tell me truthfully whether you'd have preferred for me to have given it all my in the duel." Harry stated.

"No, I wouldn't have." Cassandra admitted. "But still..."

"Cass, none of the trainees have ever been in a real life combat situation; you have." Harry got back up and put his hands on Cassandra's arms. "They needed to know how quickly they could be taken out of the game, and what could await them if they are. You've already seen what can happen if things go wrong."

"So because of what happened at the Ministry, you cut me a break?" Cassandra asked.

"Yes." Harry pulled Cassandra into a hug. "I know how afraid you are of that curse because of what happened to Sirius, and yet you still went ahead with it. I also know now what frightens you more."

Cassandra shivered. "Dominus is probably my worst nightmare as you guessed from when I faced the Boggart."

"That might be so, but at least you didn't freeze up." Harry said encouragingly. "Which is something you were afraid of doing."

"I didn't think of that." Cassandra hugged Harry and released him. "But as I'm not going to be out in the field, hopefully I'll never have to face him again."

"I hope that's true too." Harry picked up the stuffed bat he'd bought Cassandra. "Now at least you can face up to this fear."

"It's hard to be frightened of a stuffed animal, Harry." Cassandra took the bat and hugged it to her. "Harry, I really am sorry about what I said earlier."

Harry smiled. "I've already said that I forgive you. I'm not so sure I'm going to forgive you though for telling Solace I'm single."

Cassandra grimaced. "What was I supposed to say? You know I don't like lying."

"So because of that, you and I are going on a double date tomorrow." Harry had intended to say no to Solace until she'd told him that it would be a double date.

"She mentioned she was going to ask you but I told her I thought you'd say no. Did she say whether Simon had agreed and where we're going?" Cassandra put down the stuffed toy, and walked over to the refrigerator to get Harry some champagne, and put the bottle he'd brought with him inside it.

“Valdez agreed, and we're going to a wizarding nightclub.” The contempt in Harry's voice told Cassandra he wasn't particularly fond of the idea.

“Joy.” Neither was she.

“It's your bed, and I have to lie in it.” Harry sat down. “For that, you're going to watch Gladiator with me tonight.”

Cassandra pulled a face. “I was going to have an early night, and I really hate that movie.”

“I'm well aware of that fact.” Harry told her as she switched on the TV, and slid the movie Harry had requested into the DVD player. “But it's your punishment, Black, for making me going on a date I'd never normally have agreed to otherwise.”

Cassandra scowled but nevertheless curled up to Harry as the movie started. “You didn't have to, Sebastian.”

“You know very well that I did.” Harry put his arm around her as they got comfortable. “Now hush up, and watch the movie.”

Next Chapter: Sorry Thomas' appearance will be in the next chapter which will be up either tomorrow or Thursday, as I've split this chapter up.

Chapter 31: Prey

28th August 2004

Cassandra tried to concentrate on what Simon Valdez was saying, but she was finding it hard. "I'm sorry, my mind wandered for a moment."

"The music is pretty distracting." Simon wasn't exactly a fan of the nightclub. He glanced over to the dance floor where Harry and Julianne Solace were dancing. "I'd have never pegged Auror Sebastian as someone who'd relax enough to go somewhere like this."

"That's because you think he's a stuffed shirt, isn't it?" Cassandra looked over to see Harry laugh at something Julianne had said.

"No, it's because I think he's an uncompromising and inflexible bastard, actually." Simon had been surprised when Julianne had said that she liked Harry.

"He can be that." Cassandra admitted. "But he's also a good guy."

"What was he like to train with in such close quarters?" Simon knew that he wouldn't have wanted to spend eight months of one-on-one training with Harry. This was the first chance that he and Cassandra had had to discuss the training, as up until then Cassandra had refused to talk about it.

"Tough but fair." Cassandra conveniently forgot about all the times she'd felt like crying and giving in when Harry had pushed her. "It was Harry's idea that I learn about the theory as well as the physical training as I originally intended to do only the physical part."

"I've been privy to some of Auror Sebastian's physicals and I can't exactly say I'm a fan." Simon scowled as he remembered how hard Harry had driven them all, refusing to give them any quarter even when they'd been close to dropping. "But I have to admit, the

demonstration he gave when he first took over the physical part of the course was pretty amazing."

Cassandra hadn't heard anything about it until then. "What demonstration?"

"Auror Sebastian took on four other Aurors and wiped the floor with them in less than four minutes." Simon had never seen anyone work that quickly before. "He moved far quicker than I've ever seen anyone else do before. Needless to say I wasn't the only one who sat there open mouthed. I think that's when Solace there decided she liked him."

Cassandra didn't want to dwell on what Solace liked about Harry. "She's seems very nice. What's she like?"

"A bit of a tough cookie actually." Simon spared his colleague a glance before turning back to Cassandra. "I think most of the trainees as well as some of the qualified Aurors have tried to get her to go on a date with them."

Cassandra's curiosity got the better of her. "And what about Harry?"

"As far as I know he was one of the few who didn't." Simon hadn't either. "But his position precluded it at the time, or perhaps he prefers to play hard to get."

A gurgling laugh burst out of Cassandra. "Harry doesn't have to play hard to get."

Simon looked contemplatively at Cassandra. "Don't tell me, you've got a thing for him too."

"Harry's just a friend, Simon." Cassandra wasn't going to tell Simon exactly how far the thing she had for Harry actually went.

"I'm glad to hear it." Simon looked at Cassandra's empty glass. "Do you want something else to drink?"

“Thanks.” Cassandra watched him press the small button at the side of the table, and a house-elf appeared.

Simon gave it their order and it disappeared, returning a few moments later with their drinks. After taking a mouthful, Simon gestured to the dance floor. “Would you like to dance?”

Cassandra didn’t really want to but not wanting to be a spoilsport agreed. “Okay.”

As they reached the dance floor, the music changed and a slow record began to play. Cassandra could have cursed as Simon pulled her close to him, his hands splaying across her back. Across the room, Harry had just sat down, missing Cassandra and Simon as they’d taken a different set of stairs. Julianne picked up her drink. “You can certainly dance.”

“You can blame my misspent youth.” Harry glanced over at the dance floor and spotted Cassandra, a slight frown marring his forehead.

Julianne noticed. “She’s a big girl, Harry. I think she can take care of herself.”

“You don’t have to work directly with her father.” Harry reminded Julianne.

“Good point.” Julianne looked closely at Harry. “Can I ask you something personal?”

“You can, but I reserve the right not to answer.” Harry took a large mouthful of his scotch and sat back.

“How old are you really?” Julianne stared closely. “If I had to guess from your face, I’d say you were no older than me, but you certainly act a lot older.”

“Let’s just say that I’m older than you think I am.” Harry wasn’t about to reveal his true age. “Why?”

“There’s a pool on it.” Julianne admitted. “I was hoping for the inside track.”

Harry smirked. “Sorry to disappoint you.”

Julianne glanced up as Simon and Cassandra returned a lot quicker than she thought they would. She didn't know that Cassandra had complained that the dance floor was overcrowded. “So what do you think of this place?”

Cassandra sat down. “It’s not really my thing to be honest.”

Simon agreed with her. “Nor mine.”

Julianne turned to Harry. “How about you?”

“Not particularly but you said you wanted to come here.” Harry explained why he’d agree to come to the nightclub. “So I’m making the most of it.”

Julianne put a hand on Harry’s leg. “Well, seeing as we’re making the most of it, would you like to come and dance again?”

Harry shrugged. “Why not?”

Cassandra watched as once the couple reached the dance floor, Julianne wrapped herself around Harry as she swayed in time to the music. Cassandra turned to Simon. “I’m actually getting a headache so I think I’m going to go home.”

Simon stood up as well. “Would you like me to escort you?”

“I’ll be fine on my own, thank you.” Cassandra took some money from her purse to pay for the drinks.

Simon pushed it back at her. “I can pay for a few drinks, Cassandra.”

“Thank you.” Cassandra stepped out of the booth.

Simon wasn't going to let Cassandra just leave. "I'll take you to get your jacket and make sure you've apparated out safely." Simon then walked with her to where she'd checked her jacket in before going with her to the apparition point to find a line waiting to leave. "Even though I don't like nightclubs, I had a nice time tonight."

Cassandra opened her purse again. "So did I but I'd feel better if you'd at least let me pay you for my drinks."

"I said I've got it." Every time they went out Cassandra continually offered to pay. "As tonight wasn't really our thing, would you like to go out to dinner with me tomorrow night?"

After looking over to the dance floor, where she doubted she'd be able to get a piece of paper between Harry and Julianne as they were dancing so closely, Cassandra agreed. "I would."

Simon pulled Cassandra to him and kissed her slowly before letting her go. "Restaurant Villegas at seven o'clock."

"I'll meet you there." Cassandra had never yet let Simon collect her except for the first date they went on when he'd collected her from the Ministry, and even then they'd gone out in a group.

Simon kissed Cassandra's hand, before gently lowering it. "Goodnight, Cassandra."

Cassandra stepped away. "Goodnight, Simon." She then apparated home, where she headed for the bathroom, stripping her clothes off, leaving them strewn across the floor like a trail of breadcrumbs. After showering she dried herself off, and then slipped into her favorite nightgown, intent on a bowl of ice-cream to eat in bed. Opening the bedroom door, she jumped a mile when she came face to face with Harry leaning against her kitchen counter. "Harry, what are you doing here?"

"Valdez said you were feeling unwell." Harry pushed away from the counter.

“It’s just a headache.” Cassandra smiled tightly at Harry. “You didn’t have to leave the nightclub.”

Harry disagreed. “I wanted to make sure you were alright.”

“Where’s Julianne?” Cassandra wasn’t aware of how short she sounded.

“In my apartment.” Harry admitted.

“Well you’d better not keep her waiting then. And I’m tired, so I’ll say goodnight, Harry.” With that Cassandra turned around and went back into her bedroom, before carefully shutting her bedroom door behind her.

The Next Night

Simon led Cassandra to the apparition point where another couple Simon recognized was standing behind them. “It seems we can’t get away from people we know.”

Cassandra glanced over. “I don’t really know them.” She turned back to Simon. “Thank you for dinner this evening.”

“It was my pleasure.” Simon wondered whether he would now finally be able to get Cassandra alone.

He knew he was going to be disappointed again as soon as Cassandra spoke up. “So I guess this is it.”

“I guess it is.” Simon decided to be blunt. “Unless you want to go back to your place for coffee.”

“It’s late.” Cassandra just couldn’t bring herself to go any further than kissing Simon, and she was worried if she invited him back, he’d want more than that.

Simon put a hand on Cassandra's waist. "Cassandra, I'm not asking to sleep with you, just to spend a little alone with you in somewhere a little more relaxing than at a wedding, in a restaurant or at a nightclub. We've been dating for two months, and I can't remember a single time when we've been alone."

Guilt flooded Cassandra, and she acquiesced. "Just for one coffee then. Hold out your arm as I'll need to side apparate you through the wards."

The couple behind them waved at Simon, who waved back just as Cassandra apparated them out. As soon as they arrived, Cassandra let go of Simon's arm, and walked over to the sofa, a somewhat puzzled look on her face. "Harry, what are you doing here?"

"Watching your television." Harry smiled brightly. "Did you have a nice dinner?"

"We did." Cassandra walked into the kitchen. "I'd offer you a coffee Harry, but it looks as if you've already helped yourself to my wine."

Simon wasn't happy about the threesome. "Would you like me to go?"

Harry smiled lazily. "Don't leave on my account. Sit down, Valdez."

Cassandra opened the fridge. "Simon, I don't actually have any milk so unless you don't mind black coffee it will have to be wine or beer."

"Beer, please." Simon sat down on the chair, not really wanting to sit by Harry.

Cassandra had no such qualms and flopped down next to Harry after passing Simon a beer. "So what's wrong with your TV that you see fit to invade my apartment?"

"I don't know. It wouldn't work." Harry knew even though she was acting affronted, Cassandra was giving off a sense of relief. "I hope you don't mind if I finish watching this documentary."

“I wouldn’t be very a nice friend if I said no.” Cassandra picked up the glass of wine she'd poured herself.

“So where do you live, Valdez?” Harry enquired, keeping half an eye on the program.

Simon mentioned a quiet but affluent wizarding village. “With my parents in Salton Lakes, Sir.”

Harry didn’t offer to let Simon call him Harry. “That must cramp your style.”

Cassandra nudged Harry with her elbow, a grin on her face. “A bit like you with me. You’re almost as bad as living with Dad.”

“I’d take the hint, but I’m watching this.” Harry smiled widely at Cassandra, before his smile dropped as he looked back over at Simon. “You seem tense, Valdez.”

“Cassandra, I think I’d better go.” Simon put down the beer, and stood up. “Do you want to walk me out to the hallway?”

Harry put a stop to that. “You can actually apparate directly from here. It's only warded coming in.”

Simon hid his annoyance at being thwarted of getting Cassandra alone. “Goodnight Sir, Cassandra.”

Cassandra smiled but she wasn’t about to kiss Simon goodnight in front of Harry. “Goodnight, Simon.” After he’d vanished, Cassandra turned on Harry. “What the hell were you playing at?”

“Did you really want me to leave you alone with him?” Harry asked.

“No, but...” Cassandra was cut off.

“Was he that tense earlier?” Harry thought Valdez had seemed overly nervous.

“No, but he didn’t have his pajama clad boss grilling him then.” Cassandra pointed out.

Harry shrugged. “Just be glad I did. Otherwise I think you’d have been fending off his advances.”

“Not everyone is trying to get someone into bed, Harry.” Cassandra observed. “Simon had already said he wasn’t interested in sex, and that he just wanted to spend some time alone with me.”

“Cassandra, I’m a man, and believe me he was interested in having sex with you.” Harry’s voice trailed away as he realized something he’d missed as he’d been baiting the newly qualified Auror. “Actually, come to think of it, no he wasn’t. But he was extraordinarily tense. Something’s not right.”

“Harry, what are you babbling on about?” Cassandra asked.

Harry didn’t answer, and unholstered his ever present wand before reinforcing the wards on the apartment. Cassandra suddenly felt nervous. “Harry, what are you doing?”

Harry transfigured his pajamas into comfortable clothing. “Something about Valdez was off.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Harry. You know very well that you were deliberately making him nervous, and...” Cassandra would have gone on but a loud bang stopped her. “What was that?”

Harry scowled. “Someone breaking through the wards.”

“Why would they do that?” Cassandra unholstered her own wand.

“Because obviously they want to get in.” Harry felt the apartment shudder as another ward fell. “Those wards won’t hold forever. Don’t try apparating out; you won’t succeed. He’ll have already made sure of that.”

Cassandra felt her blood run cold as she realized who Harry was talking about. "It's Dominus, isn't it?"

"I believe so." Harry looked around the apartment as he thought quickly. "We can't get out, and he's going to be coming in thanks to your erstwhile boyfriend."

"Damn right he's erstwhile." Despite her quipping, Cassandra couldn't hide her fear. "What are we going to do, Harry?"

"Fidelius on your bedroom." Harry decided. "Quickly, I need you repeat everything I say."

Harry cast the charm as Cassandra finished reciting her part. Cassandra shivered as she felt magic wash over her. "Will he know?"

Harry shook his head. "The warding should hopefully have prevented him from noticing."

Holding Harry's hand, Cassandra ran into the bedroom, closing the door behind them. A few minutes later she heard a voice she recognized. "They were in here just five minutes ago."

"Valdez, do you see them now?" Dominus snapped. "Search the place; they may well be hiding."

Harry could feel Cassandra shaking as he heard the banging of doors and the sound of revealing spells being cast. "They won't find us, Cass."

Cassandra clung tightly to Harry. "Harry, I've got to say that I'm pretty close to being scared out of my mind."

"We're perfectly safe in here." Harry reassured her. "Even if they'd been in here before as Valdez has, the Fidelius makes sure that they won't remember that there should be a door into your bedroom, let alone the fact that there's a bedroom here."

“They must have left for his place right after I apparated out.” Simon snapped angrily. “Bitch, she wouldn’t even let me give her more than a goodnight kiss yet she’s obviously putting out for that wanker.”

Anger overtook fear; Cassandra was completely indignant. “He’s got a bloody nerve complaining when all he was trying to do was gain my confidence in order to hand me over to him.”

“I’m surprised he didn’t simply try and take you before now.” Harry observed.

“We’ve never really been alone before now. Funnily enough, Simon actually pointed it out to me this evening.” Cassandra informed Harry. “I suppose he could have overpowered me and forcibly taken me from an apparition point but he obviously didn’t want to take the chance that he’d fail. So he’s obviously been waiting until he thought we’d be alone. What I don’t understand is why now; he knows you’re here.”

Harry knew why. “We’re not in a public place, Cass. Obviously Dominus didn’t intend for me to live through this to be able to tell anyone.”

Cassandra clung even tighter to Harry. “I didn’t think of that.”

Outside the bedroom, the conversation continued as to where Cassandra and Harry had gone. “If they’re not here, then they’ve obviously gone to wherever Sebastian resides.” Dominus deduced. “Do you know where he lives?”

“No.” Simon had no idea as Harry’s address was classified. “All I know is that he lives in a Muggle neighborhood as he mentioned his television was broken which is why he was here. Solace might know as she left with Sebastian last night. I can give you Solace’s address.”

Dominus turned to his men. “I’ll deal with extracting the information from this Solace if she knows. Return to the house, and await my orders.” He turned to the man at his side. “You will remain.”

Harry and Cassandra listened as small pops sounded as the majority of the men apparated out. Cassandra was worried about Julianne. "He's going to attack Julianne, Harry."

"I know." Harry was frustrated. "But I can't do anything about it right now."

Dominus focused his attention on Simon. "You're a disappointment, Valdez. You've been seeing Black for two months, and the first chance you get to acquire her, you fail."

"She's always avoided being alone with me." Simon defended himself. "And I didn't know that Sebastian would be here tonight."

"That's because you lack foresight." Dominus was angry that Simon had failed at something so simple. "Perhaps a taste of what awaits you should you fail again might help you focus. Crucio."

Cassandra shrank against Harry as she listened to the screams of the young man who'd intended to take her. "I really hate that curse."

"You're not alone." Harry then reassured her as to Simon's fate. "Dominus won't kill him; he needs him to try and continue to get to you. He's clearly not aware we're listening in."

Harry's words would have proved to be true about not killing Simon except for the fact that Dominus was interrupted by the return of one of his men. "Yes?"

The man bowed low. "We have the other girl, Dominus. I've taken the liberty of arranging a portkey to take you there."

Dominus took the portkey as he dropped the Cruciatus spell. "It seems that I no longer need you, Valdez."

Harry swore. "Dammit. He's going to kill him."

“How do you know that?” Cassandra didn’t want someone to die but she found it hard to care about Valdez after what he’d tried to do to her.

“In a moment.” Harry wanted to listen.

Simon began to beg as he too realized what was going to happen to him. “Please, I’ll do better next time. I swear.”

“You’re a failure, Valdez and I don’t permit failure, particularly a failure I no longer need.” Dominus raised his wand. “Avada Kedavra.”

Cassandra closed her eyes. “Oh Merlin, he did it.”

Simon's demise wasn't Harry's immediate concern. “I need to know who this other girl is, and why he is willing to accept her instead of you.”

Cassandra remembered what Harry had told her about Voldemort's rebirth. “Do you think it's for some sort of ritual?”

“I really have no idea.” Harry was frustrated. “I wish he'd say something else.”

Dominus obliged when the man who'd remained, asked a question. “What about questioning this Solace?”

“I no longer need Black, so we can forget about her.” Dominus wasn't going to waste his time questioning Solace.

The man, whose voice Harry didn't recognize, continued asking questions. “And what about Sebastian?”

“I hoped to be able to deal with him tonight but he can wait.” Dominus informed the man. “If he's as good as Valdez says he is, then I'm looking forward to when we do finally meet. It's been too long since I've had some sport worthy of my attention.”

Harry felt a shiver go down his spine. "Well that answers our earlier question about why Dominus wasn't bothered about me being here. Just what I need; a Dark Lord in need of some sort of diversion."

Harry then fell silent as Dominus barked out his orders. "Portkey out. I'll be there momentarily to deal with the girl."

Harry listened carefully as a pop sounded. "He's still here."

"How do you know?" Cassandra couldn't hear anything.

"I can hear him breathing." Harry was grateful to be a werewolf. "I don't dare go out until he's gone. I don't want to take him on alone unless I really have to."

"But you managed before at the Ministry." Cassandra pointed out.

"He was going easy on me. He knew that the floor was going to be destroyed, so he didn't bother to put much effort into attacking me; he obviously expected the explosion to take care of me. And he had no idea of who I was then. Now he does." Harry acknowledged. "And I have no intention of giving up my life merely for the sake of his entertainment."

Cassandra didn't want Harry doing it either. "Do you think he'll stay here?"

Harry shook his head. "I doubt it. He said himself he doesn't need you, and he's willing to wait to get his hands on me."

A small pop sounded as Harry finished his sentence. Cassandra let out a long breath. "Do you think that's him leaving?"

Harry put a finger to his lips so that he could listen. After several minutes, Harry relaxed. "There's no-one out there unless they're holding their breath. But just in case, stay in here, and don't come out until I come and get you."

Cassandra grabbed Harry's arm. "I thought you didn't want to take him on alone."

Harry didn't. "I'm certain he's gone, Cass. I just need to make sure. And if I'm wrong, I can always apparate back into this room if I need to, as I'm not trying to apparate outside of the wards he'll have put in place."

Cassandra was still nervous. "Be careful."

"I will." Harry then drew his wand and apparated out into the sitting room. Finding it empty, he cast several spells but all came back clean. Spotting Valdez' body on the floor, Harry created a portkey before placing it on it; the body vanishing from sight as it activated. Harry then put up several wards around the apartment before going back in for Cassandra. "You can come out now. His wards are already disintegrating; they weren't long term. He obviously didn't think it would take very long to do what he was going to."

"Did they leave Simon here?" Cassandra couldn't see a body.

"No." Harry lied. "He's been removed. I want to drop the Fidelius on your bedroom, and set a new one in place for the whole apartment, and one on my own. After that I need to do the same for Solace just in case, as well as alerting Sirius as to what's happened."

"You can't leave me alone." Cassandra was petrified. "What if he comes back?"

"He won't." Harry opened the front door. "And the sooner we get the Fidelius on this place, the quicker the possibility is eliminated."

Five minutes later Cassandra and Harry had dealt with both of their apartments. "You do know that after tonight Dad's going to want to wrap me up in cotton wool, don't you?"

Harry nodded. "I'd probably go more with locking you up in an ivory tower and throwing away the key."

Cassandra groaned. "And I'm sure you'd help him."

Harry acknowledged the truth in Cassandra's words. "I think I would after Dominus' appearance tonight."

Cassandra shivered. "I know I'm not going to be able to go to sleep knowing that he's been here. Do you really have to go?"

"You know I do, Cass." Harry closed the curtains. "You'll be perfectly safe here as I'm the only one who knows where this place is now apart from you. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Don't leave me alone too long." Cassandra said nervously.

"I won't be long." Harry promised and vanished.

Grimmauld Square

Mione heard the pop of apparition just as she was finishing changing Nat. Popping her son back into his crib, she walked out and glanced over the balustrade just in time to see Thomas and Lucius Malfoy vanish together. Mione checked the time and frowned as it was almost ten o'clock. Knowing that she'd find out what Thomas had been doing eventually, she headed for her room, showered and then apparated to Thomas' bedroom to find he still hadn't returned. Almost an hour later, just as Mione was getting ready to go to sleep, Thomas opened the bedroom door.

Mione hesitated dousing the light. "Is everything alright?"

"Fine." Thomas sat down the bed.

"It was a bit late for a visit wasn't it?" Mione didn't ask outright what Malfoy had been doing there.

"Something came up." Thomas began to pull off his shoes.

"Anything I can help with?" Mione offered.

"I've done what needed to be done." Thomas looked round at Mione. "But I won't be able to make dinner tomorrow night."

"I'll cancel the reservation at the restaurant then." Mione felt disappointed.

Thomas sighed. "I'm sorry, Mione. I'd put this off but unfortunately it's an opportunity that might not come again."

"It doesn't matter." Mione pushed aside her disappointment. "We can go out to dinner another night."

"I'll tell you what." Thomas shrugged out of his shirt. "My meeting tomorrow is just outside of Paris. I'm hoping to get everything concluded by the end of the next day at the latest. Why don't I book us a room at the George V? We can take an extended weekend, and have dinner on Friday at Pierre Gagnaire."

Mione's face lit up. "I'll portkey out as soon as I finish work on Wednesday. But what about Nat and Maddie?"

"Theresa is more than capable of looking after them until Monday morning." Thomas folded up his trousers and dropped them onto the stand. "I'm just going to shower."

Mione yawned. "I'll try and stay awake but I can't promise."

"Go to sleep then." Thomas kissed Mione on the forehead. "And I'll see you on Wednesday night."

"I can't wait." With that Mione settled down and closed her eyes.

30th August 2004 - Early morning

Harry apparated into Cassandra's apartment to find her asleep on the sofa, the television still on. He knelt down by her; from the state of her face, Harry guessed that she'd cried herself to sleep. "Cass?"

Cassandra groggily opened her eyes. "Harry, what time is it?"

“Four a.m.” Harry said softly. “I think you should go to bed.”

“You said you’d come straight back.” Cassandra’s voice was accusing.

“Sirius deemed you safe, and we’ve been trying to ascertain who Dominus took instead.” Harry hadn’t wanted to leave Cassandra alone but with the Fidelius in place, Sirius had decided that even though she’d be upset, Cassandra would be out of harm’s way; something Thomas’ victim would not be.

Cassandra rubbed her eyes. “Did you find her?”

“No.” Harry and Sirius hadn’t been able to locate any record of anyone being taken. “We tried all of our contacts but to no avail.”

“Have you been able to work out what he wanted me for?” Cassandra sat up.

Harry and Sirius had both come to the same conclusion as to what Dominus wanted. “At first we thought he was after the same thing he attacked your Dad for.”

“The Clavis?” Cassandra, together with Bella and Harry, was one of the few people who knew what Dominus had gone after.

“That’s what we initially thought, and that he was going to use you to get to Sirius.” Harry sat down next to Cassandra. “However our theory was blown out of the water when Henri Dompierre-St-Martin confirmed that his wife was home with him, and that their daughter is out of the country staying with her aunt.”

“Did you contact the aunt?” Cassandra picked up the glass of water she’d poured before she’d fallen asleep.

“We did.” Harry confirmed. “Henri floored her. Louise Danvers identified herself correctly before confirming that Nicole was safely asleep in her bed. She also told Henri that she’d place the house under the Fidelius as soon as she finished speaking with him.”

“What about Michaela Bradford and her daughter?” Cassandra asked about the head of USAD, the only other person who knew where the Clavis was being held.

“Both safe as well.” Harry sighed. “So we could only conclude that Dominus wanted you for something else, which means that he could have taken any girl.”

“It didn’t sound that way.” Cassandra argued.

“I’m aware of that but there’s absolutely nothing we can do.” Harry was more than a little frustrated. “Except to sit and wait.”

“Are you going back to the Ministry?” Cassandra could see lines of tiredness marring Harry’s face.

“No. Sirius has stayed. I’ll go in tomorrow at ten to take over from him and stay until just before sunset. But as it’s a full moon, I can’t stay any later.” Harry yawned. “Right now, I’m going to head home and to bed.”

“Will you stay here with me?” Cassandra didn’t want to be alone.

“Sure.” Harry headed towards the spare room.

“I want you to stay in my room.” Cassandra shivered. “I know I’m being silly but I’m still scared that he’ll find a way around the Fidelius.”

“Get into your pajamas.” Harry ordered. “I’ll just nip home and get a fresh pair.”

Cassandra had showered and gotten into bed by the time Harry had returned. “Thanks Harry.”

“No problem, Cass.” Harry slid into bed beside her. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.” Cassandra immediately shuffled across the bed and curled up to Harry’s back.

Harry could feel her shaking, and he turned around. “Nothing’s going to happen to you now, Cass.”

“I know but...” Cassandra sniffled. “I was so frightened when you didn’t come back.”

“I’m sorry.” Harry wrapped Cassandra up in his arms. “But it’s going to be alright.”

“You don’t know that.” Cassandra buried her face in Harry’s chest. “I can’t hide in here forever.”

“I think his interest in you has waned; you heard what he said.” Harry stroked Cassandra’s hair. “And I’ll stay as long as you need me to.”

Cassandra lifted her head. “You really are a good friend, Harry.”

Harry kissed Cassandra’s forehead. “You make it easy. Now why don’t you try and get some sleep? Last night was rough on you.”

Cassandra shivered as she thought about Valdez. “I certainly know that I’ll be a little more careful in picking my boyfriends out in future.”

“Cass, even I didn’t suspect anything was wrong until this evening.” Harry reminded her. “I don’t know for sure, but I think Valdez must have been a fairly recent addition to Dominus’ merry band of men. He certainly had no Dark Mark on him as at a month ago.” Harry and Sirius had taken to carrying out random checks of all Aurors and trainees. “I have a sneaking suspicion that taking you was likely part of his initiation; it would certainly explain the lack of a Dark Mark.”

Cassandra sighed. “I really know how to pick them, don’t I? Alex just wanted to sleep me, Fred wanted to talk about his ex, and Simon was using me to get an invitation into the big boys’ club.”

“Then he was an idiot.” Harry continued to rub Cassandra’s back. “And he certainly didn’t deserve you.”

“Thanks Harry.” Cassandra felt better as she snuggled her face into Harry’s neck. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.” Harry closed his eyes and soon slipped into sleep.

Tuesday 31st August 2004

Henri Dompierre-St-Martin apparated home. Wondering why Rachel hadn’t come out to greet him, he walked into the sitting room only to draw to a halt, his wand flying into his hand. “Let go of my wife.”

Dominus stood up. “That’s not going to happen, Monsieur St-Martin. You see you have something I need, and the lovely Rachel here is my insurance to make sure I’m going to get it.”

“What do you want?” Henri kept his wand held out in front of him.

“The Clavis de Propylaeum.” Dominus demanded. “Now I know from Alain that you have protections to stop me from simply ripping the information from your mind, so why don’t we make this nice and easy, and you simply tell me where I can find it?”

Henri could feel his heart beating faster as he faced the man he’d seen decimate most of his men in Claudette’s memory. “I’m afraid I have no idea what you are talking about.”

Dominus turned and beckoned. Rachel was dragged forward, a knife held at her throat. “Henri, please just tell him.”

“I can’t.” Henri didn’t know why Dominus wanted it, but he knew that it couldn’t be for anything good. “I have no idea what he’s talking about.”

“I know you’re lying.” Dominus walked towards Henri. “Alain confirmed its existence, although he wasn’t forthcoming about its location.”

“What have you done with him?” Henri had a feeling that Alain was dead, otherwise Dominus wouldn't have been in his house.

“Let's just say that identifying his body wouldn't have been possible.” Dominus left Henri in no doubt as to the fate of Alain. “Now, he refused to tell me even when I threatened his wife and son. Are you willing to give up your wife's life as well?”

Henri felt his heart sink as he realized that Antoinette and Jean Duval must also have perished; the two had vanished at the same time Alain had been taken. “Let her go. I don't know what you're talking about. Just because Alain knew of its existence, doesn't mean I do as well.”

Dominus had finished playing. “If you don't tell me by the count of five, then your wife will be joining your dearly departed co-worker and his family.”

Rachel was by now crying hysterically. “Please, Henri, tell him.”

“I cannot.” Henri dropped to his knees. “Please let my wife go. I'll take her place.”

“One, two, three, four.” Dominus halted. “This is your last chance.”

“I don't know where it is.” Henri yelled out.

“Five.” Dominus snapped his fingers.

“No.” Henri screamed out.

“Too late.” Dominus didn't turn round to watch as the Death Eater holding Rachel drew the knife across her throat before dropping her body to the ground.

Henri tried to rush forward only to find himself stuck behind an invisible wall. “You bastard. I will kill you for this.”

Dominus shook his head. "No, my friend, you will not." He turned to the other Death Eater in the room. "Bring her."

Henri paled as his daughter was dragged out of his study. "Nicole."

"Mama." Nicole screamed as she saw her mother's body, and she struggled against the man holding her.

Dominus turned to Henri. "I would have brought your sister as well but unfortunately, accidents happen."

"But Louise said Nicole was safe." Henri's voice shook.

"Which is exactly what I told her to you just after I placed her under the Imperius." Dominus informed Henri. "What I don't know is how you found out I was there."

Henri refused to help. "I have no intention of telling you that."

Dominus turned around. "Let go of her."

As Nicole was released, she tried to rush forward to go to her mother. She didn't get far as Dominus turned his wand on her. "Crucio."

Nicole dropped to the floor screaming. Dominus held the curse until Henri relented. "Commander Black warned me that Nicole might be in danger."

Dominus released the curse. "Pick her up. I haven't finished with her yet."

Henri could see blood trickling down Nicole's face where she'd hit her head on a table leg. "You will pay for this."

Dominus ignored the threat. "So Black's daughter must have returned home sooner than I anticipated. Now that mystery's been solved, onto what I really want. Where is the Clavis?"

Henri shook his head. "I do not know."

"So you've already said." Dominus sighed and walked over to Nicole. "Such a pretty girl. Tell me, Monsieur, are you willing to stand by while I torture her again? I know you know where the Clavis is, so tell me."

Henri refused. "I do not know where it is. So no matter what you do to Nicole I cannot tell you."

"Very well." Dominus thought for a second before aiming his wand at Nicole again. "Torpeo facies."

As the spell took effect, Nicole realized she couldn't feel her face. Dominus unsheathed a knife that Henri hadn't seen on the table when he'd walked into the room. "Now, Henri, I've been so good as to numb your daughter's face before I use this knife on her. However, once I've finished my artwork, I'll be removing that spell."

"You can't do this." Henri screamed. "She has nothing to do with this."

Dominus paid no attention to Henri as he walked over to Nicole, holding the knife out in front of him. "So where shall I begin?"

Henri dropped to his knees. "Please, I beg of you, don't do this to her."

Dominus turned back around and walked over to where the barrier was holding Henri back. "Then tell me what I need to know. Otherwise your daughter will never be able to look in the mirror again without remembering that you could have saved her."

Next Chapter: Sirius discovers what Thomas is after; Remus accepts an offer he might live to regret.

Chapter 32: A Bad Decision

Wednesday, September 1st 2004

Harry awoke to hear crying. Rolling over, he got out of bed and went into the other room.

Sirius glanced up from comforting his daughter to see a boxer clad Harry emerge. "May I ask what you're doing in Cassandra's bedroom dressed like that?"

Cassandra answered her father. "I was too scared to stay alone, so I asked Harry to stay with me. He was still pretty tired after his transformation on Monday night, so I told him to take my room."

Sirius relaxed at Cassandra's response. "We've found the other girl."

Harry knew from Cassandra's tearful visage that it couldn't be good. "Who was she?"

"Henri's daughter, Nicole." Sirius rubbed Cassandra's back as she once more buried her face into Sirius' shoulder.

"She's dead?" Harry opened the bedroom door back up as he asked, and pulled on the trousers he'd thrown on the floor.

"Surprisingly no." Sirius informed Harry as he came back into the room. "But her parents and aunt are."

Harry sat down as Sirius led Cassandra to sit by him on the sofa. "What happened?"

Sirius explained what Dominus had done. "So it looks as though Dominus had already gotten to Nicole's aunt before Henri contacted her. I should have made him go there."

"It wouldn't have made any difference." Harry pointed out. "Except perhaps that Rachel might have survived. How's Remus?"

“I haven’t told him yet.” Sirius admitted. “I came to tell Cassandra first, and I was then going to collect you to go and see him.”

“I’ll just apparate downstairs and get changed.” Harry stood up. “Then I’ll come with you.”

“Will you come back after you’ve told Uncle Remus?” Cassandra looked hopefully at Harry.

“As soon as I can.” Harry promised before disappearing.

Sirius turned to Cassandra. “You can come home if you want to.”

“I’ll be alright here with Harry.” Cassandra wouldn’t meet Sirius’ eyes as she declined her father’s offer.

“Cassie, is there something going on between you and Harry?” Sirius lifted Cassandra’s chin up so that he could see her face. “I’m not going to be angry if there is.”

“No.” Cassandra answered truthfully.

“Let me rephrase my question then.” Sirius wasn’t quite convinced that there wasn’t more to it than Cassandra was making out. “How do you feel about Harry?”

Cassandra swallowed hard; she didn’t want to lie to Sirius. “I really like him.”

“So why were you dating Valdez if you felt that way about Harry?” Sirius let go of Cassandra’s chin.

“Because Harry has made it clear that we can’t be anything but friends.” Cassandra admitted.

Sirius didn’t bother to hide his relief. “I’m glad to hear it.”

Cassandra’s face fell. “I thought you liked Harry.”

“I do.” Sirius didn’t want Cassandra to misunderstand him. “But he’s far too old for you, and his track record with women isn’t exactly stellar.”

“Dad, Faith is a lot younger than you, but that doesn’t seem to matter.” Cassandra pointed out. “And Harry’s not like that anymore.”

Sirius knew he couldn’t argue about the age gap as Cassandra had made a good point but he could about Harry’s past. “Look at Tonks. She was miserable because Harry wouldn’t commit. He’s told me himself about Seville, and how he felt about her, to say nothing of how he treated his previous girlfriends. I don’t want that for you, Cassie.”

“Harry cares about me Dad.” Cassandra argued.

“Has he ever said he loves you?” Sirius asked the most important question.

“No, but...” Cassandra was interrupted by Sirius putting a finger on her lips.

“I want the same for you as Orion has with Katherine, and not what I had.” Sirius began to explain his reasoning. “Cassie, as you know, I entered my marriage with your mother not loving her.”

“But you did love her in the end, didn’t you? You said you did.” Cassandra argued.

“Eventually yes, I grew to love her, and it nearly killed me when she died.” Sirius admitted. “But it wasn’t the kind of love I feel for Faith. And that’s what I want for you. Harry’s never going to be able to offer that to you.”

“I know that.” Cassandra wiped her eyes. “But I can’t help the way I feel about him.”

Sirius had a sinking feeling that there was even more to it than just liking Harry. "Cassie, you feel more than just affection for Harry, don't you?"

Cassandra nodded. "I'm in love with him. I have been for a long time."

"Oh Cassie. Harry's never going to feel the same way about you." Sirius felt his heart go out to his daughter. "And you're not doing yourself any favors by spending so much time with him. It's just going to make it harder for you when he finds someone else."

"He already has." Cassandra's voice quivered as she said it.

"Oh Cassie." Sirius stroked Cassandra's head. "I'm so sorry."

"It's okay." Cassandra tried to smile and failed. "I'd rather have Harry as my friend than nothing at all."

"Cassie, I think you should come home for a while." Sirius reiterated his earlier offer.

"Dad, I work with him every day so going home isn't going to make any difference." Cassandra pointed out. "And besides the person he's seeing works at the Ministry, so it's not going to make things any easier for me."

"Who's he seeing?" Sirius was usually aware of inter Ministry romances.

"Julianne Solace." Cassandra grimaced. "It's kind of annoying, as I really like her as a person; well I would if she wasn't seeing Harry."

"So that's how she knows where Harry lives." Sirius had just thought that Cassandra had told Solace. "I didn't realize."

"She spent Friday night with him." Cassandra said miserably.

"Would you like me to transfer her?" Sirius offered, only half-joking.

“Dad! I love you but you can’t protect me from everything.” Cassandra squeezed Sirius’ hand. “Especially myself.”

“I sometimes wish you’d stayed five years’ old. Things were a lot easier then.” Sirius smiled ruefully. “I knew how to make things better if you were upset or you were hurt.”

“And you still do.” Cassandra reassured her father. “It’s just that now I’m more likely to get hurt in a far bigger way but I do know that you’ll help me pick up the pieces if I do.”

“And I always will.” Sirius pulled Cassandra into a hug, just as a pop of apparition came from the hallway.

Harry walked in and came to a halt. “I’m ready.”

Cassandra gave Sirius one last hug and got to her feet. “I’ll see you later then.”

Harry walked over and also gave Cassandra a hug, before kissing her forehead. “Order in a pizza if I’m not back before five, and we’ll watch a movie when I get back.”

Sirius watched how gently Harry treated Cassandra but didn’t see anything except for friendship in his actions. “Harry, we need to go.”

Harry let go of Cassandra. “No girlie movies alright?”

Cassandra smiled as Harry and her father vanished, before slumping onto the sofa to think over what Sirius had said.

Harry turned to Sirius as they walked up the road towards the Watchers’ Council. “Why didn’t we just apparate in?”

“I wanted to talk to you alone.” Sirius stopped walking. “Is it true you’re seeing Solace?”

Harry's eyebrows shot up into his hairline. "Is nothing sacred around the Ministry?" He shook his head at himself. "I should know better than to ask that."

Sirius waited. "So?"

"Not exactly." Harry sighed. "She asked me out on a date so I went out with her, Cassandra and Valdez last Friday to a nightclub."

Sirius knew then how Cassandra had known that Solace had spent Friday night with Harry. "And?"

Harry didn't answer the question immediately. "Why the interest?"

"Harry, less than an hour ago you came out of my daughter's bedroom in your underwear." Sirius said in a challenging voice. "Why do you think I'm interested?"

"Cassandra and I are just friends." Harry reiterated what Cassandra had told Sirius.

"And you and Solace?" Sirius still wanted his original question answered.

"She came back to my place, we had a glass of wine together, and then she went home." Harry then explained why Solace had been there. "I wouldn't even have taken her back home with me except for the fact that Valdez said that Cassandra had left because she felt unwell. I didn't think it very polite to simply ditch Solace to check on Cassandra, so she came with me."

Sirius still hadn't finished. "So are you seeing her again?"

"I don't know." Harry answered shortly. "We haven't set anything up, and after what happened the other night with Dominus, I'm not exactly sure it would be in Solace's best interests to get involved with me. I can't exactly keep an eye on her as I do with Cassandra."

Sirius backed off. "I'm sure Solace is well aware of the risks."

“Seeing as she’s now living in a house covered by the Fidelius charm, I’d say she probably is.” Harry sighed. “If she had any sense she’d steer clear of me.”

“Harry, any woman would steer clear of you if she had any sense.” Sirius grinned.

“Thank you so much.” Harry grinned back before becoming somber as they reached the entrance to the Council building. “I take it you’re going to tell Remus.”

“He’s my friend and deserves to hear it from me.” Sirius opened the door. “That’s if he’s still here.”

Just as Sirius opened the entrance door, upstairs Mione was surprised to see Remus walk into her office. “I didn’t expect to see you today; I thought you were working from home.”

Remus had been. “I didn’t intend to come in but I’ve got a few things I need to go through with you before you leave tonight.” He glanced over as a knock sounded on Mione’s office door, making him scowl. “I wish your secretary would learn what the hell ‘do not disturb’ means.” Remus knew he was being grumpy but he’d not had a good transformation despite the potions he’d taken, and subsequently was still tired.

Melanie opened the door. “I’m sorry to bother you two but Commander Black and Assistant Head Auror Sebastian have just arrived. They’re in Mr. Lupin’s office. Commander Black said it’s urgent.”

“Thank you.” Mione turned to Remus. “We can pick this up afterwards.”

“Come with me.” Remus assumed Harry and Sirius were there on a Council related matter.

Sirius turned from the window as two cracks sounded behind him. "Remus, Mione."

"You look serious, Sirius." When Sirius didn't smile, Remus knew that he was going to be hearing something bad.

"I'm afraid I've got bad news, and it's personal." Sirius glanced meaningfully at Mione.

Mione took the hint. "I'll leave."

"You can stay." Remus told her. "What is it?"

"I'm sorry Remus but your mother and her husband have been killed." Sirius said gently.

Shocked, Remus sat down. After a few minutes, he found his voice. "I know it can't have been a routine death, otherwise you wouldn't have brought Harry with you. What happened?"

"It was Dominus." Sirius said in a soft voice. "He attacked them in their home."

"How did he get past the wards?" Remus was aware that Henri had had quite formidable wards on his home.

"Your sister helped them." Sirius began to explain, only to stop his explanation at the look of horror on Remus' face. "She's not a Death Eater, Remus."

Remus exhaled. "They forced her?"

"Yes." Sirius had questioned Nicole at the request of the French Ministry, that was still in some chaos after Henri's death. "She was taken from her aunt's house, and refused to help initially. But after Dominus used the Cruciatus on her, she relented, and helped him get through the wards."

“Is Nicole dead as well?” Remus found that his hands were shaking, as he asked about the sister he’d last seen when she’d visited Rupert at St. Mungo’s just after Easter.

“No. Nicole’s badly shaken, and has some minor injuries.” Sirius sighed. “I’m really sorry Remus.”

Mione passed the brandy she’d poured to Remus. “Drink this.”

Remus knocked it back. “Thanks Mione.”

Mione placed a hand on Remus’ shoulder, unsurprised to find that he was trembling. “Where is Nicole now?”

“In a holding cell at the Ministry.” Sirius winced at the angry look on Remus’ face. “It’s for her own protection, not because she’s done anything wrong.”

Remus wasn’t about to leave his sister in the cell. “I want her out of that cell.”

“Remus there’s more, but we can’t talk here.” Sirius glanced over at Mione. “I’m sorry, Mione but I really can’t tell you this.”

“I understand, Sirius. I’ll take care of things here, Remus.” Mione stood back as he got up. “But if you need anything, just let me know.” Mione held out her arms so that she could hug Remus.

Remus wrapped his arms Mione, burying his face in her hair as she held him. “Thank you.”

Sirius waited for them to separate before taking Remus’ arm. “I’ll apparate us through security. Harry, would you arrange for Nicole’s release?” Sirius then apparated them out.

Remus found himself in Sirius’ office. “I thought you were going to take me to the cells.”

“There are a few things I want to discuss first.” Sirius indicated that Remus should sit. “Dominus went after Cassandra on Saturday night.”

Remus was horrified. “Is she alright?”

“Thankfully Harry averted a possible disaster.” Sirius explained what had happened, and that they’d checked with the other two heads of the Auror Divisions. “We thought Nicole was safe.”

“It’s not your fault.” Remus didn’t blame Sirius. “Henri should have checked more closely. So what happened to my mother and Henri?”

Sirius gave him the potted version. “We believe Henri initially refused to help Dominus and that he executed Rachel as a lesson. We know from Nicole that Henri gave up what Dominus was looking for once he’d threatened to maim her, with Henri only agreeing to do so if Dominus released Nicole first. Dominus released her, so Nicole isn’t aware of what happened afterwards. Neither are we. Henri’s body was found outside of the French Ministry; I doubt we’d have known it was him unless a note attached to it hadn’t told us.”

Remus shuddered. “What did the note say?”

“It was addressed to me.” Sirius passed it over.

Remus scanned it. “So why is Dominus warning you if he’s already gotten what he wants?”

“Because he hasn’t.” Sirius could see he’d confused Remus. “Only Harry and I know where the real item he was looking for is. Henri and Michaela both thought they knew but we didn’t tell them that their versions were decoys. It’s a ploy we’ve used before.”

Remus was stunned. “So they all died for nothing?”

Sirius sighed. "I'm sorry Remus but I have to protect our Ministry's interests. Henri and Michaela both wouldn't have hesitated to do the same."

It didn't make Remus feel any better knowing that. "So seeing as Henri sacrificed my mother for his belief in his Ministry interests, are you going to tell me what was Dominus looking for?"

"That's why I brought you here. Dominus is looking for something called the Clavis de Propylaeum." Sirius explained. "It's what he came after me for last year."

Remus frowned as the name rang a bell. "I don't remember that from the memory you showed me."

"Bella obliviated that part in order for me to show you the memory." Sirius explained. "We don't actually know what the Clavis does but the power the thing radiates is off the scale. After several wizards died trying to find out what it did, it was hidden away."

"I might know what it is." Remus told Sirius as he recalled where he'd seen the name. "Or at least have an idea of what it is."

Sirius' mouth fell open. "Then why don't we?"

"Because it's part of Slayer lore, and as far as we were aware, had nothing to do with the wizarding world. " Remus used his photographic memory to recall the passage he'd read some time ago. "It's actually part of a prophecy."

"I take it you remember it." Sirius had always been jealous of Remus' excellent memory at school.

"I can." Remus recited the passage. "When the time of the Four Pillars arrives He of the Darkness shall come forth. He shall wield Curse, Crystal, Cipher and something to defeat all those who may challenge Him. And should He succeed then the Darkness will reign in this world and all others. There was a single word notation at the side of the passage; 'Clavis'."

“That explains why you've heard of it. But what is the something?” Sirius had spotted the odd word in the recitation.

“The passage doesn't actually say something; the proper word is actually scratched out.” Remus had an idea why. “I think it's to stop anyone from trying to bring the Four Pillars together.”

“And Dominus is after one of them.” Sirius swore. “Who else knows about this prophecy?”

Remus told Sirius who the only other person who'd been aware of this particular one was. “Rupert did. And if he was a Death Eater as we believe, it certainly explains how Dominus knows about it.”

“We need to find out what the other Pillars are.” Sirius finished noting down the three elements of the Pillars. “Do you have any idea what they may be?”

Remus shook his head. “No but I'd guess that the Clavis has to be the Cipher.”

“How do you know that?” Sirius had no clue as to what the Clavis was even though Remus had just told him what three of the four Pillars were thought to be.

“Roughly translated, Clavis means key. I know a cipher isn't exactly a key but a code. However, unless the Clavis is the mystery item, I doubt it's the Crystal or the Curse.” Remus deduced. “And I think we can safely say that Dominus is the Darkness.”

“I agree.” Sirius passed a piece of parchment to Remus. “Can you write the full prophecy down for me?”

Remus began to do so. “Sirius, I want to tell Mione about the Clavis, and the Four Pillars. She might be able to help. Her research skills are far better than mine.”

“I can't allow you to do that. I shouldn't really even be telling you but I felt that after what has happened, you were owed an explanation.” Sirius informed him. “To be perfectly honest, the less people who know the better.”

Remus passed over the parchment. “So can I take Nicole now?”

“Where are you going to take her?” Sirius asked.

“Back to the Council first. I need to speak to Mione before I disappear for a few weeks, and then I'm going to take Nicole abroad I think. She doesn't need to be cooped up while she gets over this, but I can't risk her being seen out here in public.” Remus had been thinking about it, even as he'd been talking with Sirius. “We both know from the note he left you that Dominus has realized that the Clavis is bogus, and even though he's turned his focus back on you, I'm worried that he might still come after Nicole.”

“Which is why she was placed in a cell.” Sirius explained his reasoning for incarcerating the young girl.

Remus span round as Sirius' door opened, and Harry led a pretty, blond haired girl into the room. “Nicole.”

“Remus.” Nicole broke away from Harry, and rushed into her brother's arms.

Remus held his sister tightly. He had half expected her to be in tears but he could smell the distinctive odor of calming potion, and knew that he'd probably have to deal with her tears once it wore off. “I'm going to take care of you now.”

Nicole clutched Remus tightly. Sirius stood up. “I can side apparate you from here back to the Council if Harry will take Nicole. It will save you from having to go through the main building.”

“Thank you.” Remus let Harry take Nicole before Sirius apparated him out.

As soon as he materialized, Nicole again broke away from Harry to rush to her brother. Mione stood up. "Can I get you anything?"

Remus shook his head. "Nothing at all."

Sirius turned to Harry. "You may as well go back home. I'll head back to the Ministry."

"You're sure?" Even though it had been two nights ago, like Remus, Harry had had a bad transformation and he too was still tired, and he wanted nothing more than to sit down and relax.

"Go." Sirius ordered. "Remus, if you need me, don't hesitate to contact me."

"I won't." Remus shook Sirius' hand. "Sirius, I just want you to know that I don't blame you."

"I didn't think you did." Sirius clapped his other hand on Remus' arm before stepping back and, like Harry had, disappeared.

Mione turned to Remus. "What are you planning to do?"

"I can't take the chance that Dominus won't come after Nicole again." Remus felt Nicole start in his arms. "So I'm going to take Nicole away for a few weeks; she needs to get away from everything."

Mione didn't hesitate to make an offer. "You can stay with Thomas and me on the Island. We're not actually going to be there from tomorrow until we return from Paris on Sunday night so you'll have some time alone first."

"I couldn't impose." Remus began to refuse. "I can..."

Mione interrupted him. "Remus, the Island is warded to the teeth. There's no way Dominus is getting anywhere near it. I'm not taking no for an answer."

If he accepted Mione's offer, Remus knew that Nicole would be able to come to terms with what had happened in a safe place without the threat of Dominus hanging over her head. "Then thank you."

"If you want to go home and pack, I'll meet you there. We can portkey directly to the Island." Mione offered. "Thomas has the jet at the moment, so I can't offer to take you that way."

It was only then that Nicole realized that Mione must be quite wealthy. "You have a jet?"

"My husband's family does." Mione explained briefly. "But Thomas uses it mostly."

"It is your island?" Nicole finally looked up at Mione.

"Yes, we own it." Mione said, a little embarrassed. "I know you probably don't wish to return home right now, so I'll arrange for some clothes for you."

"Monsieur Black arranged for someone to collect some of my things. They are in my pocket." Nicole explained. "But thank you."

"I'll tell Melanie I'm going, and I've already cancelled most of your meetings but there are still some I can't deal with, so I'll need to talk to you about them." Mione had begun dealing with things the moment Remus had left. "I'll meet you at the Academy."

Nicole looked at her brother in confusion. "The Academy?"

Remus quickly explained. "I sold the house in London and moved into an apartment at the Watchers' Academy near Hogsmeade. The house was too big for one person."

Nicole became silent as she thought about Rupert.

Remus gave her a one-armed hug before addressing Mione. "Are you sure Thomas won't mind?"

“Thomas would be delighted to have you and Nicole as our guests.” Mione assured Remus as Thomas had always said that her friends were welcome. “Now go, and I’ll join you shortly.”

Later that evening

Mione portkeyed to Gare du Nord Station before taking a taxi to the George V. Once there, she headed for the Suite that Thomas had sent her a note to say that he was staying in. Knocking on the door, she waited for Thomas to answer it.

Thomas swung open the door to find his wife there. “I expected you several hours ago. Work get in the way again?”

From his sarcastic tone, Mione could tell that Thomas was not in a good mood. “Not exactly. I’ve just gotten back from the Island.”

“What were you doing there?” Thomas closed the door and followed Mione into the sitting area of their suite.

“Remus’ sister was attacked the other night, and her parents and aunt killed.” Mione sat down heavily, fatigue lining her face as two international portkey trips in the space of four hours had really taken it out of her. “Remus needed somewhere safe to take Nicole, and I said that you wouldn’t mind if they stayed on the Island.”

“They’re there now?” Thomas sat down beside Mione.

“Yes, which is why I’m late.” Mione thought Thomas looked somewhat taken aback. “You don’t mind do you?”

“Not at all.” Thomas couldn’t exactly tell Mione that he was staggered to discover that the girl whose parents and aunt he’d had killed was going to be staying with him.

“You don’t seem very happy about it.” Mione stated.

“I’m not very happy but it has nothing to do with you inviting anyone to stay.” Thomas got up, and changed the subject. “I ordered dinner a while ago. I’ve placed warming charms on it.”

“So you’re not going to tell me what’s wrong?” Mione got up from the sofa and headed for the dining table.

“You really want to know?” Thomas lifted the lid off the serving platter to reveal foie gras and Melba toast.

Mione shuddered at the sight of the pate. “I’ll pass.”

“I ordered you a small portion of salmon.” Thomas lifted another lid.

“Thank you.” Mione was hungry and started to eat. “So, are you going to tell me why you look so upset?”

Thomas took a mouthful of the foie gras, and swallowed it before answering. “The deal I thought I’d successfully made turned sour when the other side reneged on me.”

“What are you going to do about it?” Mione asked.

“I’ve already done it.” Thomas told her as he poured white wine into her glass. “Let’s just say that the other side won’t be reneging on any more deals with me.”

“So you’re going to refuse to deal with them again?” Mione took a mouthful of the wine.

“They’re no longer in a position to do deals with anyone.” Thomas smiled tersely at his wife.

Mione winced. “Remind me not to cross you.”

Thomas shook his head, and smiled. “As if you would.”

“So what will you do now? Abandon the deal?” Mione wiped her mouth with her napkin as she’d quickly finished the salmon.

“No. I will resort to my original plan.” Thomas passed over several pieces of the toast to Mione.

“So the deal that fell through wasn’t your first choice?” Mione loved the thin slivers of toast.

“No, it wasn’t.” Thomas spread some of the pate onto the toast before putting his knife down. “I only went ahead with my failed deal as a last minute hitch resulted in my first choice becoming unavailable.”

“So has it become available again?” Mione leant back in her chair as she waited for Thomas to swallow his food and answer her.

“Not yet but I intend to see that it will do.” Thomas pushed his plate away.

“And how exactly do you intend to do that?” Mione lifted the lid off the next platter to find a small steak and a baked potato. “Thank you.”

“I know you like it.” Thomas had ordered veal, something else Mione wouldn’t eat. “And in answer to your question, I intend to do it by finding the right leverage. Something I tried to do yesterday but didn’t succeed as I expected to.”

“So how do you know you’ll be able to do it this time?” Mione bit into her steak, savoring the taste in her mouth.

“Because I’m going to make an offer he won’t be able to refuse.” Thomas bit into a green bean he’d picked up from his plate.

“Who’s he?” Mione pinched one of Thomas’ green beans as she asked.

“He is the head of an organization based in London.” Thomas passed a small helping of his vegetables over to Mione. “But I don’t intend to go directly to him. I’m going to go through his daughter.”

“She’s part of the business?” Mione smiled at Thomas as she passed over half of her baked potato to him.

“She works for him.” Thomas took the potato and added butter to it before taking a mouthful. “I’m sure that she’ll be more than willing to persuade her father to get onboard once I lay out my terms.”

“So what kind of business is it?” Mione asked with interest.

“Security.” Thomas poured himself some more wine. “But enough of business, I have a surprise for you.”

“What is it?” Mione recognized that Thomas didn’t want to discuss it any further, so she ran with the change of subject.

Thomas reached into his pocket and pulled out two tickets. “I thought that instead of going out to dinner on Friday night, you’d prefer to go to the opera.”

“But this is in New York at the City Opera.” Mione exclaimed.

“Which is where *La Bohème* is being staged.” Thomas smiled. “I remember you said that you wanted to see it.”

“Oh thank you.” Mione got up from the table and went to hug Thomas. “I tried to get tickets but they were sold out.”

Thomas pulled her onto his lap. “So I take it you’re pleased.”

“More than pleased.” Mione kissed him swiftly, intending to get back up.

Thomas, however, had other ideas and deepened the kiss before lifting his head up. “Why don’t we forget about the rest of dinner?”

“I'm pretty tired anyway, and more than ready for bed.” Mione grinned as she let Thomas lift her up and carry her into the bedroom.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Remus found himself comforting his weeping sister. “Shh. Everything's going to be alright now.”

Nicole lifted her head. “I was so frightened, Remus. I thought he was going to kill me. He killed Maman, Papa and Tante Louise.”

“I know he did.” Remus rocked Nicole. “But you're safe here. This Island is unplottable as well as warded. Dominus will never find you here. I promise.”

Monday Morning

Thomas got up and headed out onto the verandah where he'd instructed that breakfast be laid out. “Good morning.”

Nicole gave a small scream. “Sorry, Monsieur, I did not you see come out.”

“I didn't mean to startle you.” Thomas sat down, and inclined his head politely. “I'm Thomas Seville, Mione's husband. It was late when we arrived back last night so I didn't get a chance to meet you then.”

“I am Nicole Dompierre-St-Martin, Remus' sister, Monsieur Seville.” Nicole said politely as she returned the nod. “Thank you for allowing us to stay.”

“I had nothing to do with it.” Thomas poured himself some tea as he studied the girl who was visibly shaking. “Mione was the one who arranged everything. And do please call me Thomas, Mademoiselle St-Martin.”

“Then you must call me Nicole.” Nicole, however, was very nervous and nearly knocked over her coffee cup.

“Good morning Nicole, Thomas.” Remus held his face to the sun as he stepped outside.

Thomas smiled up at Remus, who he'd seen the previous night. “Good morning, Remus. I was just introducing myself to your sister but I think I frightened her.”

Nicole stood up. “Please excuse me.” With that she left the verandah.

Remus sighed and sat down. “I’m afraid she is still a little skittish around people after what happened to her. She ended up in tears yesterday when one of your gardeners touched her on the shoulder to ask her a question.”

“I am not entirely surprised that she's like that after what she went through.” Thomas handed a pile of newspapers to Remus. “I thought you might like to keep up with the current news. There are both Muggle and wizarding newspapers in the pile.”

“Thank you.” Remus took the newspapers. “How was your stay in Paris?”

“We left on Friday to go see *La Bohème* at the City Opera in New York.” Thomas explained as although he'd seen Remus the previous night, they'd done little except exchange greetings. “So our stay in Paris was cut short.”

Remus smiled. “Don’t tell me. Mione wanted to see it.”

“She did.” Thomas confirmed, before asking Remus what he had on. “So tell Remus, what are your plans for this week? Mione told me that she couldn't deal with all of your meetings as well as her own.”

“She's right. Unfortunately I have several meetings that I need to attend back in London tomorrow, so I was going to take my leave tonight.” Remus told Thomas. “I'm going to arrange for Nicole to stay with Sirius and his wife.”

“You and your sister are quite welcome to stay longer.” Thomas offered. “I would be more than happy to keep an eye on her while you are in London. You can then return here, and extend your stay until the end of the week, or longer if you wish.”

Remus pondered Thomas' offer as he knew that despite her nervousness, Nicole was finding the Island a place of solace. “If you are quite sure.”

“I am.” Thomas picked up a copy of the Times. “I don't have any meetings scheduled this week, so I'll be able to ensure that Nicole is taken very good care of.”

“That's very good of you.” Remus smiled at Thomas. “Nicole loves it here, so thank you.”

“It's my pleasure. There's a selection of food on the table just over there.” Thomas opened the newspaper. “If you'll excuse me, I want to catch up on business.”

“As do I.” Remus helped himself to some breakfast before copying Thomas and disappearing behind the London Times.

Next Chapter: James shocks Remus and Sirius; Luna makes a discovery; Regulus has to decide what side he wants to be on.

Chapter 33: A New Discovery

September 19th 2004

Nicole hugged Mione. "You have been so kind letting me stay in your beautiful house."

"I'm glad you did. I hate to think what might have happened to Maddie if you hadn't been here." Mione thanked the girl. "I wish you could have stayed longer."

Remus shook his head. "We've trespassed on you both for long enough. Tell Thomas I hope his business meeting went well."

"I'm just sorry that Thomas had to leave unexpectedly." Mione hugged Remus as well. "I'll see you tomorrow."

The two vanished moments later, and Mione then headed for the nursery to get the children up. Theresa was already there and dressing Nat. "I thought you might like a hand with Mr. Thomas gone."

"Thank you." Mione grabbed her daughter out of her crib. "I do."

Maddie was patient as Mione changed her nappy and began to dress her. "Dada."

"Sorry Maddie. You've got Mummy today." Mione pulled on Maddie's socks. "Daddy's gone to Myanmar. Can you say Myanmar?"

"Mama." Maddie grinned toothily at her mother.

"Nice try." Mione grinned back. "Daddy's gone to get a ruby. Can you say ruby?"

"Dada." Maddie laughed happily as Mione picked her up.

Mione just smiled at her daughter's attempts and addressed Theresa. "I'll take her into the playroom and start on her breakfast, if you can bring Master Nat in when he's finished playing up."

"I will, Mione." Theresa was having a game with Nat, who didn't want to get dressed and was letting everyone know it. "Go ahead; I'll be along shortly."

While the two children were being fed, the two women talked for a while. Theresa eventually brought up the ruby Mione had mentioned. "Is Mr. Thomas buying the ruby for you?"

Mione shook her head, prompting Maddie to copy her. "No. I'm not actually quite sure what it's for." Mione wasn't going to discuss that she thought it was for use as an experimental power source.

Theresa recognized that Mione didn't want to discuss it, and she dropped the subject, going on to talk about the children instead.

October 24th 2004

Nicole sighed and put down the book she was reading. "Did you not ever get tired of researching when you were a part of the Scubbies, Xander?"

"That would be a member of the Scooby Gang, Nicole, and not really, as I was more of the donut boy than the researcher." Xander said blithely.

Luna knew that Xander was downplaying his part. "Xander, but I know you did more than that."

"Not really." Xander continued to be dismissive of his former role as he opened the box labeled walnut whips. "Who ate the last one?"

Nicole blushed. "I am sorry, Xander. It was me."

Xander sighed. "My life is blighted by blondes. The first one is tough enough to beat me up, the second was a demon, the third wants to tie me down for life, and the last one eats my walnut whips."

Luna threw a bookmark at her fiancé. "I'm not trying to tie you down for life. If I remember correctly you got down on both knees and begged me to share your life."

"As I was saying, my life is blighted by blondes, in particular by the one who I can't live without." Xander winked with his good eye at Nicole. "And unfortunately she also has an excellent memory."

Luna smiled up at him. "And don't you forget it Mr. Harris."

"With you to remind me, how could I ever do that?" Xander dropped a quick kiss onto Luna's lips. "Now enough talking, and more looking, while I go in search of more food."

"Do you really think that we will find anything to help?" Nicole was fed up with trawling through the old books that Sirius' library afforded.

Luna shrugged as Xander disappeared out of the door. "I don't know, and it might go a lot quicker if Xander actually helped instead of being more concerned about feeding himself."

Nicole had at first been disconcerted by the banter that ran between the newly engaged couple, but she soon realized that the two of them enjoyed it. "You love Xander very much, yes?"

"With all my heart." Luna ran a slightly chewed pearly tipped nail over her sapphire engagement ring.

"Are you looking forward to moving to San Francisco?" Nicole continued looking down the index of the book in front of her while she asked.

"Not really." Luna's usual happy smile faded a little. "I will miss my family and my friends but Mummy said that if Xander is what I want, then I have to make sacrifices."

“I asked Remus why he was sending Xander back, and he said that he needs him there.” Nicole sighed heavily. “I do not understand though. That Buffy girl is in London to replace Xander; why bother to swap them?”

“I think Remus is helping Buffy out of a sticky situation.” Luna explained. “She tends to mess up a lot when it comes to boyfriends.”

“So you are being sacrificed because of her bad choices?” Nicole asked, as Remus had only told her that Buffy was the original slayer, that she was a decent person who didn't always get it right, and that she was coming to stay in London for a few months.

“Sadly yes.” Luna couldn't help but feel down about the exchange. “The only silver lining is that I'll be able to see some of the local wildlife in San Francisco. Xander has already promised to take me to Alcatraz to see the Prison Pixies that still live there, and to Monterey Bay to see the Silvery Seal Mermaids.”

“That sounds delightful.” Nicole liked Luna but found her taste in magical creatures a little bizarre. She therefore changed the subject back to the books she had in front of her. “I have two more books left. Do you want the big one or the little one?”

“The big one.” Luna squealed as the book weighed almost as much as she did. “Why do they make books this heavy?”

“To drop on things.” Xander suggested as he walked back into the room, a bowl of ice-cream in his hand. “Faith said that we have to share one bowl otherwise we won't eat our dinner.” Xander shook his head. “Sirius has ruined that girl. She used to wear leather pants, red lipstick, and low cut...”

Luna glared at Xander. “I'm sure Nicole does not need to know what Faith used to wear.” Luna turned to Nicole. “Faith, as you probably already know, was also a Slayer.”

“I know a little about Faith.” Nicole closed the small book as she'd found nothing. “Remus said that she had had a bad time but she is a nice girl now.”

“I wouldn't say that.” Sirius grinned as he walked into the library. “If only you'd seen...”

Remus slapped his hand over Sirius' mouth. “Sirius, they don't need to know how depraved you are.”

Xander's face lit up. “I do.”

“No, you do not.” Luna glared at him. “Not unless you want me to hide your Twinkies.”

“She's a mean, heartless girl.” Xander spooned a large mouthful of ice-cream into Luna's mouth. “But that's just the way I like my women.” Luna couldn't retort with the ice-cream filling her mouth.

“Which is exactly what I was saying.” Sirius dodged Remus' hand.

Remus shook his head. “You really will never grow up, will you?”

“Life's too short.” Sirius flopped onto a chair, and put his feet onto the table. “So kids, what have you found?”

“Nothing.” Nicole lamented. “I have searched and searched but...”

Having swallowed the ice-cream, Luna let out an almighty shriek, interrupting Nicole's lament. “I've found something.”

Sirius immediately sat upright. “What?”

“A way of transferring the soul.” Luna looked troubled as she read through the passage. “But I don't know if this makes things better or worse.”

Sirius tugged the book away from Luna and began to read out loud. 'Corpus Vertus – A hollow crystal used in the transference of the soul.' It doesn't seem that bad."

Remus tried to recall any mention of the Corpus Vertus and came up blank. "I actually don't think I've heard of that."

"I'd have expected you to tell me if you had." Sirius remarked wryly.

"Just keep reading." Luna urged.

" 'The Corpus Vertus should be used only as a last remedy for once the transference has taken place, the soul can never be returned to its original vessel.' Okay, that doesn't sound so good." Sirius continued reading. 'The soul bearer should be aware that once they take up residence in the new vessel, they will no longer be the same person they once were.'

"So there will be changes?" Xander queried. "Will they grow another head or something?"

Sirius briefly smiled at the young man. "Wouldn't that be fun? But sadly not." Sirius returned his attention to the book. 'These changes will be permanent, as the soul bearer will slowly take on the attributes of the vessel.'

"Translation for the stupid amongst us." Xander pleaded.

"Simply put, Xander." Remus sometimes wanted to scream at Xander's deliberate obtuseness, but he explained anyway. "If Voldemort took over the body of an ax-murderer, then he's probably going to be ten times worse than the ax-murderer. If he took over the body of a ballet dancer, then we might have some hope."

"After seeing him in action at the French Ministry, I can safely say he's probably neither of those." Sirius was as troubled as Luna by what he was reading. "According to Harry, he was already a fairly clever chap, if somewhat egotistical. Now I'd say he's a very confident individual who isn't afraid of anything, and he has daunting

dueling skills as well as appearing to be magically strong. Not exactly a good combination.”

“I agree with Sirius. I've seen him in action twice now, and both times he's been cool under fire, and probably with good cause.” Harry, who'd been outside of the door waiting for Cassandra to finish in the bathroom, had heard the conversation, and given up his vigil for the room. “So if what Luna has found is correct, then we have a probable idea of how he did it now, but not who he is.”

“How did he take Frank's memories though?” Nicole enquired as she tidied up the pile of books on the desk.

“I'm of the opinion he stripped them out of his victim...” Sirius hypothesized. “...using a bastardized form of the Memoria Evoco spell. Or perhaps by using the Animus Rapio spell.”

“I'd probably go with the second one.” Harry suggested. “As he literally raped the memories from poor Frank, whoever he really is.”

Cassandra came gliding into the room. “I've finished in the bathroom.”

“Thank you.” Harry disappeared.

Cassandra sat down. “So what did I miss?”

Sirius briefed her on what they'd found. “So as Harry said, we're still none the wiser as to who Dominus is but at least we have some idea of how he did it.”

Nicole was troubled by what she'd just heard. “Rupert is in the same condition as this Frank person and has no memories, yes?”

“That's right.” Remus confirmed. “Why?”

“I do not want to think it but what if Rupert did the same as Dominus?” Nicole suggested. “He is in the same condition. I know you said that his memories had been stripped but what if it is more than that? What if he took the body of someone else?”

Remus shook his head. "I can't see it. Why would he do that? He wasn't injured like Voldemort, and in need of a replacement arm. And why would Dominus help him?"

Luna had an answer to the second question. "Perhaps Rupert somehow did a deal for something Dominus wanted." Luna didn't know about the Four Pillars as Sirius still hadn't revealed their existence to the others, even though Remus had argued with him about it. "But I have no idea why Rupert would want a new body. As Remus pointed out, Rupert wasn't injured."

Nicole, however, had an idea as to why her brother would have done it. "Would swapping his soul make Rupert magical?"

Remus hesitated before nodding somewhat grudgingly. "Yes it would, as our magic is not part of the soul but of the body. It is infused throughout us, making up part of our very being."

"Nicole has brought up a very good point." Harry walked back into the room. "We know Rupert was a Death Eater. If he's going to betray everyone that way, why not go one step further?"

Nicole frowned. "How did you hear that in the bathroom?"

"I'm a werewolf." Harry said in a matter of fact voice. Nicole knew the basics about Harry and what he was there for, but Harry still hadn't filled her in fully.

Nicole knocked over her seat as she backed up in alarm. "Sacrebleu."

"Harry's quite harmless." Cassandra assured the girl. "I would have thought you wouldn't be frightened with Uncle Remus being..."

Sirius interrupted his daughter. "You thought wrongly, Cassandra."

Remus was grateful for Sirius' intervention but knew that Nicole deserved to know the whole truth about him as well. "Harry's not the only werewolf here."

“Are you all werewolves?” Nicole’s voice shook as she retook her seat.

“No, just Harry and myself.” Remus confessed. “And Cassandra is right. Harry and I are both harmless.”

“How can a werewolf be harmless?” Nicole was totally stunned by the comment.

“We both take a potion called Wolfsbane which allows us to retain control of our minds, thus preventing us from attacking anyone.” Remus explained.

“Does it always work?” Nicole was still nervous about the idea.

“Yes.” Remus answered just as Harry disagreed. “No.”

Everyone turned to look at Harry. “What?”

“It is very rare that it can happen but sometimes Wolfsbane isn't enough to keep a werewolf calm and docile, and completely dull the urge to kill.” Harry began to explain.

“But that’s down to a person’s willpower.” Remus interrupted. “I might feel like ripping people apart, but when I take Wolfsbane I can simply push the feeling down.”

Harry continued. “Under normal circumstances, I’d agree with your statement. If I’m locked up in a room with a chew toy and a blanket once I’ve taken Wolfsbane, I’m a happy werewolf; well as happy as a caged werewolf can be. However, if I was placed in a situation where blood was being spilt around me in large amounts, I might end up overcoming the Wolfsbane and giving in to my more feral side.”

“But you don’t know this for sure, do you?” Xander didn’t realize that Harry did.

“Except for Nicole, you all know that my adoptive father was also a werewolf.” Harry met the girl’s nervous but interested stare. “He once found himself in a situation where blood was being spilt all round him where he had to fight to keep control of his bloodlust; a battle he lost. He ended up slaughtering several people.”

Nicole’s hand flew to her mouth. “Mon Dieu.”

“But the circumstances were a lot different than when Remus or I change.” Realizing his comments weren't helping, Harry tried to set Nicole's mind at ease. "And we're very careful."

“So I do not need to worry?” Nicole enquired.

“You don’t.” Remus confirmed. “Both Harry and I take extra precautions to ensure that we are not anywhere near anyone when we change.”

“Is there no cure?” Nicole enquired.

Harry shook his head. “Not as far as I am aware. It is something I’ll have to deal with for the rest of my life.”

“As will I.” Remus shared a look with Harry.

Nicole was curious about Harry's father. “Harry, what were the circumstances that made your father kill people?”

“He was a Death Eater and my Voldemort placed him in a situation where he knew that Dad would attack. I don’t think he expected him to attack his own men though.” Harry revealed a little more about his own past.

“This is a little much to take in.” Nicole admitted. “Knowing that your father was a Death Eater.”

Harry explained some more about his father. “Dad joined Voldemort’s ranks as a spy. Even though he took the Dark Mark, together with

everything it involved, he thought he was doing it for the greater good."

"What is the Dark Mark?" Nicole asked.

Harry had forgotten that this world's Voldemort hadn't used it. "A way for our Voldemort, who's now Dominus, to mark his men."

"As in the brand you said was on Rupert?" Nicole had known that Rupert had a brand on him but she didn't know that it had a name.

"Yes." Harry explained. "You haven't seen the one on Rupert's neck?"

"No." Nicole didn't even know it was on Rupert's neck. "What does it look like?"

Harry began to tell her. "It's a skull with..."

Nicole finished his sentence off. "...a snake coming out from the mouth."

Everyone turned to stare at Nicole. Remus took Nicole's hand. "How do you know that?"

"I have dreamt about it." Nicole gave a small nervous laugh. "Strange is it not?"

"Unusual." Harry confirmed. "You have not seen a picture of it before?"

Nicole shook her head. "I have not. I did not even know it was called that until you told me. When you started to describe it, I just knew what it was."

Harry rubbed his chin as he thought. "Tell me about your dream, Nicole."

“It is always the same.” Nicole hated the dream. “It is more of a nightmare actually. There is a man standing in shadow and he touches his wand to my arm. I can actually feel the cold wood against my skin before he burns the mark into me.”

“How do you feel when he’s doing that?” Harry pressed.

“Frightened, resigned, elated, lost and almost as if my soul has been made dirty.” Nicole struggled to find the words to describe it. “And the pain burns.”

Harry frowned. “Please roll up the sleeve of the arm you receive the Mark on in your dream.”

“Harry.” Remus protested. “You cannot think that Nicole is a Death Eater.”

“Remus, your sister has pretty much just described how it feels take the Dark Mark.” Harry examined Nicole’s arm. “Where?”

Nicole pointed to a heart-shaped birthmark. “It is always here but when I wake up there is nothing there. Until now I just thought it was a bad dream.”

Harry cast several spells on her. “I’m sorry Nicole but I need a female Auror to examine you.”

“But she said that it’s on her arm in the dream.” Remus snapped. “And if Nicole was a Death Eater, she’d hardly be likely to be telling us.”

“I’m sorry, Remus, but Harry is right.” Sirius intervened. “He wouldn’t be doing his job if he didn’t follow this through, and if he didn’t I’d have to.”

Nicole got up. “Remus, it is okay. I would prefer to try and find out why I am having these dreams.”

"I'll take you in now." Harry held out his arm. "Cassandra, can you come with us? Meet me in cell block D."

"Okay." Cassandra apparated out right after Harry and Nicole.

Half an hour later all three were back. Remus was pacing up and down, only stopping when the trio reappeared. "Well?"

"She's clean." Harry confirmed. "But I don't understand why she'd be dreaming about it. Nicole, I know this has been a bit much for you but I'd like to see your dream."

"Now?" Nicole queried.

"Please." Harry shot a look at Sirius. "Pensieve?"

"I'll get you one." Sirius disappeared and reappeared moments later with a small one. "You can use this."

Harry extracted the memory and entered the pensieve, Sirius and Remus both accompanying him. Harry watched in silence before pulling out of the memory. "There's no doubt about it. Somehow you had a Dark Mark and now you haven't."

"How can you be so sure?" Luna asked.

"Because Nicole forgot to mention a very important part that was in her dream." Harry raised up his wand. "Morsmordre."

Nicole gasped as the Dark Mark hovered over the table. "I forgot about the incantation."

"And there is absolutely no way you could have known about it unless you've received it, as I haven't told anyone else here about it." Harry dispelled the Dark Mark. "By the way, I don't want to find out anyone else has attempted to use that spell. I have no wish for Dominus' gaze to fall upon any of you, and believe me if you use that, it will. Sirius' house is warded which is the only reason why I felt comfortable doing it."

“I second Harry’s comment.” Sirius looked sternly at each person there, prompting them to all agree to never attempt the spell Harry had just used.

Harry had yet another question for Nicole. “At any time since you were kidnapped have you spent any time away alone?”

Nicole nodded. “I spent last weekend with my friends who live just outside of Paris, but apart from that I’ve always been with someone here or on the Island.”

Remus confirmed Nicole’s words. “I took Nicole and collected her when she went to her friends.”

“I still need to check that no-one has tampered with her memories.” Harry took her hand. “Nicole, I’m going to use Legilimency on you. I need you think about the Paris weekend and relax for me, otherwise this might feel a little uncomfortable.”

“I am not scared.” Nicole wanted Harry to get to the bottom of the problem. “Go ahead.”

Harry entered her mind and searched, looking for any sign that a memory had been obliterated. “Nothing.”

“So how is it possible?” Remus asked.

“Nicole, I want to do the same again, but this time focus on the time you were taken up until you were found by the French Aurors.” Harry repeated the exercise, again with no results. “I don’t know what to think.”

Luna had a theory to explain Nicole's dream. “Perhaps she’s empathic. It’s one alternative we haven’t looked at.”

“And probably the most likely one given that Harry hasn't been able to find anything.” Sirius deduced. “Nicole, as you’ve done nothing wrong, the matter is going to be dropped for the time being. But given

what you've told us, I would like you to remain with either Remus or one of us at all times. And if you think of anything else that might help us, then I want to hear about it."

"I will tell you if I do, Monsieur Sirius." Nicole promised.

Faith walked into the library. "Dinner is ready."

Sirius got up and put his arm around his pregnant wife. "Let me help you back."

"I'm pregnant, Sirius." Faith snapped. "Not geriatric."

Sirius let Faith leave on her own. "I can't seem to do anything right lately."

Remus clapped Sirius on the back. "And to think Faith has still got just over three months to go."

Sirius groaned and followed the rest of the group out.

November 6th 2004

Regulus apparated into Grimmauld Square, resisting the urge to rub his left hip where his Dark Mark was throbbing. He found Thomas walking out to greet him. "Thomas, I thought you were in Sydney."

"My presence was no longer required at the Foundation." Thomas led the way into his study. "Sit down."

Regulus had to admit to himself that he felt nervous. "I take it this isn't a social call you've had me make."

"No, it isn't." Thomas sat down opposite him. "Do you remember our talk about how you'd decide how you felt about Sirius when you were placed in a position where you'd have to choose where your loyalties lay?"

"I do." Regulus swallowed hard.

“You’re going to be placed in it.” Thomas held out a piece of paper. “I’m going to be attending this wedding next month. Cassandra Black will be there; I’m not sure about your brother as yet as it depends on his wife’s condition. You and Malfoy will ensure that your niece is taken from the wedding, and delivered to Castrum House.”

“And if I don’t want to be a part of it?” Regulus found it difficult to keep his gaze on Thomas' face.

“Do you really need me to answer that?” Thomas stared at Regulus, his face cold.

“What are you going to do to Cassandra?” Regulus asked, before making a decision.

“Nothing if Sirius co-operates.” Thomas leant forward. “So, what’s it to be?”

“Is there any set time for taking her?” Regulus answered the question with one of his own.

“That’s entirely up to you.” Thomas smiled warmly at Regulus, now that the man had made his true allegiance known.

"And if she's with anyone else?" Regulus knew what Thomas would do to him if he messed up.

"Kill them if they get in the way." Thomas instructed. "And if it happens to be Sirius, and you can take him without killing him, then do so. If not, I don’t foresee it being a problem, as I can’t see Sirius ignoring his daughter’s plight, and failing to come to me.”

Regulus didn’t dare ask what would happen to Sirius when he did. “Do you have a portkey?”

Thomas opened his desk and slid out two small rubber balls. “You can set the passwords yourself.”

Regulus pocketed the balls. "Is there anything else?"

"No." Thomas stood up, indicating that their brief discussion was now at an end. "Please ensure that you don't fail me."

Regulus had heard what Thomas had had Lily do to the former head of the French Division, and he shivered at the thought of ending up the same way. "I won't."

"I thought you might say that." Thomas picked up a folder. "I'll let you see yourself out."

November 26th 2004

Tonks opened up the door, and ran off. "Come in."

James sniffed. "What's burning?"

"Dinner." Tonks yelled back. "I thought I'd try cooking again."

James used a spell to freshen the air. "I thought we'd agreed that giving me food poisoning once was enough. Then again looking at that, I think you've killed it."

"I think I more than killed it." Tonks vanished the food. "Pizza?"

James grimaced. "Absolutely not. I'll be back shortly."

Tonks waited patiently for James to return; when he did, his arms were laden with dishes. "Where did you go?"

"Home." James enlarged the dishes. "We have salad, salmon, garlic bread, and strawberries and cream."

The two spent the meal talking about what had been happening in their respective lives before sitting down on the sofa. Tonks sighed loudly. "I feel stuffed."

“You’re not alone.” James put his arm around his girlfriend. “I’ve really missed you.”

“And I’ve missed you as well.” Tonks admitted. “I hate that I only get to see you every other weekend.”

“Marry me then.” James suggested with a grin on his face. “You can see me every day that way.”

Knowing James wasn’t serious, Tonks burst out laughing. “Yeah, right James. Nice joke.”

James smiled back, before standing up. “Speaking of jokes, how would you like to get your own back on Sirius?”

The previous month, in one of his more childish spats, Sirius had fooled James into thinking that Tonks was pregnant. Tonks hadn’t been impressed when she’d found out. “What do you have in mind?”

James smirked. “We’re getting married, or at least Sirius will think that we are.”

“Do you really think he’s going to believe it?” Tonks let James pull her to her feet.

“We’ve a trip to make.” James picked up his jacket. “Come on.”

Tonks went to the hall closet and pulled out a jacket. “So where are we off to?”

“The Ministry.” James didn’t give Tonks a chance to say anything before taking her hand, and apparating to the Ministry.

Tonks looked askance at James. “So what are we doing here?”

“Getting an international portkey.” James tugged Tonks inside the main building, and to the relevant section before stopping at the window to address the man sitting there. “I need a return international portkey.”

“Name.” The bored clerk didn’t even bother to look up at James, preferring to read his book instead. “And reason for the portkey.”

James winked at Tonks before addressing the young man. “James Potter, Callaghan. And it’s so that I can go to my wedding.”

James’ name caused the clerk to pay attention. “Professor Potter!”

“If you’ve finished gawping, Callaghan, we’d like an international portkey.” James repeated his statement.

Callaghan then realized what else James had said. “You’re marrying Tonks?”

“Yes, he is, Callaghan.” Tonks glowered at the young man who’d attended Hogwarts with her. “So for the third time, we’d like an international portkey.”

“Where to?” Callaghan asked.

“Tonks?” James deferred to her.

“Las Vegas.” Tonks informed him. “I want it voice activated, and the password should be ‘for the fourth time.’”

“Funny, Tonks.” Callaghan processed the application. “That will be sixty galleons.”

James reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet before tapping it with his wand. “Sixty galleons.”

Callaghan confirmed the correct amount had been deposited and he handed over the portkey. “It’s a key.”

“I can see that.” Tonks took it in her hand. “I’d like to say it was nice to see you again but I’d be lying.”

With that Tonks dragged James off, her curiosity piqued at James' earlier form of address. "Why did you call me Tonks? You never call me Tonks."

"Because Callaghan would have died laughing if I'd called you Nymie in front of him." James explained his reasoning. "Now did I hear right? Las Vegas?"

"Yep." Tonks grinned. "Hold tight. For the fourth time."

The two of them vanished. James burst out laughing as they arrived. "I didn't really intend to take the portkey, Nymie, just to let Sirius think I had."

"It seemed a shame to waste such an expensive portkey." Tonks led James from their apparition point out onto Las Vegas Boulevard. "Have you ever been to Vegas?"

"No, as it's not exactly my scene." James looked round. "I suppose this all lights up at night."

"It does. I forgot with the time difference that it would still be daylight here." Tonks patted her pocket to double-check she'd got her purse. "So where do you want to stay?"

"These are Muggle hotels." James reminded Tonks.

Tonks grinned. "And I have a Muggle credit card."

"How much available credit do you have on your Muggle card?" James enquired.

"About two hundred pounds." Tonks guessed. "Or thereabouts."

James pulled his own wallet out, and withdrew a black colored card. "It's a good job then that my credit card has a lot more on it than that."

Tonks' mouth fell open. "You have a Muggle credit card?"

“I do.” James couldn’t help but smile at Tonks’ expression. “When I was invited to own one, I was going to decline but Remus talked me into accepting. He said that you never know when you might need one. Surprisingly I use it more than I thought I would, and Gringotts automatically pays it as soon as I make a purchase on it.”

“So now I know we can afford something a little better than I would have picked, where do you think we should stay then?” Tonks asked.

“I have no idea.” James stopped walking. “Pick a hotel.”

Tonks was aware that James was wealthy but she had no idea of how wealthy as they’d never touched on the subject. “If you want moderate, then somewhere like the Luxor is good, or the Excalibur is cheap and cheerful. It’s where I stayed when I came over with a group of friends for a weekend.”

James knew then that Tonks had no idea of what the black credit card he held signified in terms of his personal wealth. “Do I look like a cheap and cheerful kind of man?”

Tonks laughed. “Well at the other end of the spectrum there’s the Bellagio, the Venetian or...”

“The first one.” James told her.

One hour later, using Muggle money that he’d obtained with his credit card, James tipped the porter who’d shown him the facilities of Penthouse Suite he’d just rented for two nights. “I think this will do nicely.”

Tonks giggled as the door closed behind them. “James, this is crazy. A normal hotel suite would have done fine.”

“Rubbish.” James took Tonks’ hand. “I think we need some clothes. Let’s go shopping.”

Tonks didn’t asking twice, and let James lead her out.

Two hours later, they arrived back. James groaned as he dropped onto a chair. "Remind me never, ever to go shopping with you again."

"I'll pay you back." Tonks fished the shrunken bags out of her pocket.

"I don't want it." James refused, knowing that the clothing was well out of Tonks' price range. "They're a gift for going along with my joke."

"Sirius is going to bust a gut." Tonks sniggered.

"He's certainly going to be shocked." James agreed.

"It will serve him right." Tonks wandered into the bedroom. "This is really nice."

"There's actually another bedroom, if you'd like one of your own for getting changed in." James pointed towards the other direction. "While you were busy checking out the wet bar, I was being shown what this place had to offer."

"I don't care about getting changed in front of you." Tonks told James.

"Tonks, I know that." James had seen Tonks do it often enough in the two months they'd been sleeping together. "But I also know that you like to drop clothes everywhere."

Tonks grinned. "You need to learn to relax. A few clothes on the floor aren't going to hurt."

"I like to be able to see my floor." James replied sagely. "So clothes aside, what do you want to do?"

"You really need to ask?" Tonks wore a mischievous look as she answered.

James shook his head. "I meant something out of the bedroom."

"So did I." Tonks headed towards the door. "I want to play the slot machines."

After an hour of watching Tonks enjoying herself, James had begun to fidget. Tonks looked round. "You really hate this don't you?"

"Yes." James didn't lie.

"Let's go then." Tonks grabbed his hand and led him out of the hotel and down the strip until she came across a wedding chapel. She giggled. "Shall we go and see what we're supposed to be doing?"

James had to laugh. "If you really want to."

When they stepped into the chapel, several couples were waiting to get married. Tonks dragged James past them and into the chapel before slipping into a seat at the back to watch a couple whose ceremony was about to begin. James heard a sniff and looked at his girlfriend. "Nymie, what's wrong?"

"I always cry at weddings." Tonks sniffed again.

"But you don't even know them." James fished his handkerchief out of his pocket.

"It doesn't matter." Tonks wiped her eyes. "Look at how in love they are."

James glanced at the couple who were, he had to admit, looking adoringly at each other. "You're the last person I would ever have thought would be a closet romantic. I don't remember you crying at Katherine's wedding."

"I used a spell." Tonks admitted. "Katherine saw me crying at Hermione's wedding, and she told me in no uncertain terms that she didn't want a blubbing bridesmaid."

“My daughter can be quite sharp when she wants to be, can’t she?” Working with her, James was slowly starting to see a side to Katherine he hadn’t seen before.

“She can.” Tonks exchanged a smile with the couple as they went by, and started sniffing again.

“What are you going to be like at your own wedding?” James asked as Tonks wiped her eyes again.

“If I was ever to get married, I’d probably flood everyone out.” Tonks blew her nose.

Yet another couple came in and the whole service began again, starting Tonks off once more. James couldn’t help but smile. “You come across as being tough and independent but you really are a kitten on the inside, aren’t you?”

“I can’t help it.” Tonks gave a watery smile. “I cry at christenings; I cry at funerals; but most of all I cry at weddings. Just seeing a couple looking at each like that makes me feel all tearful.”

James glanced over at the young couple who were saying their vows. “They certainly look as if they’re in love.”

Tonks looked at them. “I envy them.”

“Why?” James asked in a gentle voice.

“Because they both know that the other person loves them.” Tonks sighed. “I’ve never had that.”

James took Tonks’ hand. “I can provide half of it.”

Tonks felt her heart jump. “Are you saying you love me?”

James nodded. “I am.”

“James, err, I...” Tonks was cut off by James putting his finger on her lips.

“You don’t have to say it just because I did.” James didn’t want to hear it for that reason. “I’d rather hear it from you because you mean it.”

Tonks removed James’ finger. “Harry was right.”

James was a little taken aback to hear Harry’s name. “I didn’t envisage hearing your ex-boyfriend’s name when I told you how I felt about you.”

“I’m only mentioning him because he told me something I didn’t believe at the time.” Tonks informed James. “Funnily enough it was on the day we started going out.”

“Again, I don’t need reminding of why you’d been talking to Harry.” James responded as he remembered that Tonks had slept with Harry the previous night.

Tonks scowled. “James, just shut up, and let me finish.” Tonks lifted a hand to touch James’ face. “He told that I needed to find someone I really care for, and I have. James, I love you.”

James forgot about Harry, and leant over and kissed Tonks, before glancing over at the couple of the chapel, and asking a question. “Nymie, would you marry me?”

Tonks thought he was joking again. “James, don’t you think one joke proposal is enough?”

James shook his head, his face somber. “I mean it. Marry me.”

Tonks’ smile fell off her face as she realized that James was being serious. “Are you mad? We’ve only been going together for just over four months.”

“Nymie, I know it’s crazy and it’s totally unlike me.” James picked up Tonks' hand and kissed it. “But would you like to get married?”

“Tonight?” Tonks wanted to make sure she understood James correctly.

“Tonight.” James confirmed. “So what do you think?”

The Next Day

Sirius yawned as he sat reviewing the weekly reports from the department heads that were sitting on his desk. He hated working Saturdays but it was Harry’s Saturday off, so he had little choice. Signing off on the first few reports, he picked up the international portkey log for the week, skimming it until he came to the penultimate names on the list. “I don’t believe it.” Getting up, he apparated out.

Remus almost dropped his mug of tea as Sirius appeared in front of him. “You could knock first, Sirius.”

Sirius thrust the piece of paper under Remus’ nose. “Look at the end.”

Remus glanced at it, and directed a withering stare at Sirius. “Nice try, Sirius. You don’t really expect me to believe this do you?”

“Get up.” Sirius demanded.

Remus sighed and did as Sirius. “I hope you realize how tired I am. It was a full moon last night, Sirius.”

“I know exactly what it was as Harry has today off because of it.” Sirius apparated them both to the international portkey booth where Neil Callaghan was once again sitting behind the window. “Good morning, Callaghan.”

“Commander Black, Professor Lupin.” Callaghan’s usual sloppy attitude disappeared as he literally jumped to attention at the sight of the two men.

Sirius thrust the piece of paper at Callaghan. "Is this genuine?"

Callaghan nervously looked at it. "Yes, Sir. Mr. Cash signed it before I took it up last night."

Remus could smell how nervous the young man was of Sirius, and he knew then that the log was genuine. "Thanks, Callaghan."

"Professor." Callaghan had completely forgotten that Remus no longer taught at the school.

Remus followed Sirius outside of the Ministry. "Where are we going?"

"I need a drink." Sirius looked at his watch. "Ten o'clock. Do you know anywhere that is open yet?"

"Yes." Remus took Sirius' arm and apparated them to an alleyway. "This way."

Remus pushed open the pub door. "Morning, Jack."

"Remus." The barman nodded politely. "You must be desperate; we've only just opened."

"It's just one of those days." Remus didn't explain why he was there. "Can I have my usual?" He then turned to Sirius. "What do you want?"

Sirius looked in bewilderment at the names of the beers. "Err, I'll have a glass of red wine."

"Can you open a bottle of the Tignanello 2005, and I'd like two glasses with that. I'll settle up with you before I leave." Remus waited for Jack to uncork the bottle before taking it, the two glasses and his double bourbon with coke over to a table.

"You obviously drink in here a lot." Sirius sat down next to Remus.

“It’s actually just down the road from the house I lived in.” Remus knew that Sirius had no idea where he was. “So after work, I’d occasionally come in here with Mione. Occasionally grew to quite often after she married Thomas.”

“Why?” Sirius took his glass of wine from Remus, sniffing it and swirling it around the glass before sampling it. “Not bad, but I prefer the 2004.”

Remus sighed. “Sirius, you are such a wine snob. You can buy the next bottle.”

“Fair enough.” Sirius agreed before remembering where he was. “This is a Muggle pub, and I don’t have any Muggle money on me.”

Remus sipped his bourbon. “I have Muggle money on me; you can pay me back.”

Sirius relaxed. “So now you can answer my question.”

“I’ve made a few friends here.” Remus responded. “And while they’re not on the same intellectual level as Mione, they still make for an interesting conversation.”

“Now you mention Mione, I noticed how you held her when she hugged you after you found out about your mother.” Sirius hadn’t intended to bring it up but the opportunity was too good to miss.

“Mione’s a good friend, Sirius.” Remus began, only for Sirius to interrupt.

Sirius lifted an eyebrow. “So am I, but you don’t bury your face in my hair when we’re hugging. So tell me Remus, is it more?”

Remus wanted to deny it was but couldn’t to his friend, who was staring at him as if he was trying to bore a hole through him. “Yes, it is, for me at least.”

Sirius sighed heavily. "I hoped you were going to tell me I'd imagined it."

Remus shook his head. "I wish you had but you haven't. I've been in love with her for a long time, probably ever since she started working as my assistant. But then she was with Harry and I told myself she was far too young for me anyway. By the time I found out the truth about her, she'd split up with Harry and I decided to give her some time before I said anything. Unfortunately I left it too late and before I knew it, she'd started seeing Thomas. So I simply buried my feelings, and tried to tell myself that I was happy she was simply my friend; which I am."

Sirius had a warning for his friend. "Remus, don't let this get as bad as things got with Julia."

"Mione's not about to threaten to reveal what I am to anyone, nor is she in a position to lead me up the garden path, Sirius." Remus took a larger mouthful of his bourbon.

"So what are you going to do about Mione?" Sirius hoped that Remus would say forget about her, but he didn't.

"Nothing but continue to be her friend, and hope." Remus waved as someone he knew walked in. "But I'm not stupid. I know she's in love with her husband, and I'd be the last person to ever try anything, particularly after what happened with Julia."

Sirius topped up his glass. "So are you actually seeing anyone at all?"

"Sort of." Remus answered cryptically. "A friend who, like me, can't have the person she wants."

Sirius frowned. "Please tell me it's not Cassie."

Remus was totally staggered. "Cassie, as in your daughter Cassandra?"

“Yes, as in my daughter Cassandra.” Sirius clarified he meant his daughter.

“Sirius, she calls me Uncle Remus for heaven’s sake.” Remus reminded his friend. “That would just be so wrong.”

“Sorry.” Sirius now felt a little embarrassed at even suggesting it.

Remus had a question about Cassandra. “So who is Cassandra in love with that she can’t have?”

“Harry Sebastian.” Sirius couldn’t see any reason not to tell Remus. “So it looks as if you two have something in common.”

“You mean that we’ve both fallen for the wrong person?” Remus asked.

“Exactly.” Sirius wondered who else Remus could be seeing. “So would you care to enlighten me as to whom you are seeing?”

“No.” Remus answered shortly. “Strangely enough I wouldn’t.”

“Keep it to yourself then.” Sirius decided he’d find some way of finding out; he hated not knowing something. “So speaking of dating and its ilk, what do you make of James’ supposed wedding?”

“I don’t know.” Remus thought about his friend. “It just isn’t like him. Are you sure he’s not messing around? After what you did to him and Tonks, I wouldn’t put it past him.”

Sirius thought about it. “You’re probably right. He’s had a month to think about this, and he knew that it would be my day in today, and that I’d get to see the logs.”

Remus smiled. “That’s probably it then. You know what he was like at school. Even though he was a troublemaker, he always carefully planned every stunt we pulled down to the last detail. Just as he appears to have here.”

Sirius still had a small niggling doubt. "Did he say anything last Wednesday?"

Remus had met James for lunch. "Not a thing. He simply said he was seeing Tonks over the weekend, and that they had nothing special planned except for going out to dinner at La Gavroche tonight. Do you think that it's not a joke?"

"I don't know what to think." Sirius admitted. "You know as well as I do that James swore he'd never get married again after Lily."

"I think the fact that it's Tonks who's with him, makes it seem unlikely." Remus smirked. "I know that she and James have been seeing each other for four months now, but she's the last person I'd ever imagine him marrying."

"I agree they're an unlikely couple, but I, for one, would be happy to see Tonks settled down, to say nothing of James." Sirius had begun to despair of the girl settling down. "I don't think Meda would be very pleased though, Ted neither. Tonks is the apple of their eye, and I wouldn't want to be in James' shoes if they have eloped."

Remus knew that Andromeda Tonks had a sharp tongue, and an even sharper temper. "James is a big boy, Sirius. I'm sure he can take care of himself."

Sirius grinned. "If it's true, then I'd like to be a fly on the wall when Meda finds out."

"She'd probably swat you." Remus grinned back at his friend.

"Okay then." Sirius reconsidered his option. "I'd like to be there when Lily finds out."

"Sirius." Remus said in a warning voice. "Just because you two don't get along, there's no need to be like that."

Sirius snorted. "Don't get along? She hates me, Remus." He took a mouthful of his wine. "And I actually found out why at Katherine's wedding."

Remus went still. "Oh?"

"Don't 'oh' me, Remus Lupin." Sirius put down his wine glass. "Why didn't you tell me that James had a thing for me?"

"Crap." Remus ran a hand over the back of his neck. "Sirius, I couldn't. I promised James I wouldn't. How exactly did you find out?"

"I'd sat down in a nook outside to have a cigar without Faith finding out." Sirius owned up to the misdemeanor that had led to his discovery. "Lily and Katherine had stopped just on the other side of it. Katherine was actually reaming Lily out for trying to ruin things between James and Tonks, and wanting to know why couldn't Lily just forget about how much she hated her father for one night. Lily then let the cat out of the bag."

Remus waited a little impatiently as Sirius stopped talking to take another mouthful of wine. "And?"

Sirius continued. "Lily responded by saying that it's hard to forget that your ex-husband had a thing for his best friend especially when her daughter has just married his son. That pretty much ruled you out."

"So why haven't you mentioned this before?" Remus asked.

"When was the last time we got together like this to talk about anything?" Sirius pointed out. "And I was hardly going to bring it up at Cassandra's test day when he was there, now was I?"

"I would never have guessed that you knew." Remus hadn't sensed Sirius behaving any differently towards James. "You didn't act any differently towards James that day."

"Why would I?" Sirius stretched his arm across the back of the booth. "No matter what, James is one of my best friends, and always

will be. I just put it down to a schoolboy crush that Lily blew out of proportion.”

Remus’ face told a different story. Sirius sighed. “It was more than that?”

“You’re the reason their marriage came to an end.” Remus then told Sirius what had transpired.

Sirius closed his eyes momentarily as a wave of sadness for his friend washed over him. “So James almost lost his children because of his feelings for me?”

Remus nodded. “He’s pretty much lost Harry; James admitted that Harry considers Severus to be more of a father than James is. However, Katherine loathes Severus as you already know, so at least she and James have got a good relationship.”

“So how did Katherine find out?” Sirius pulled out two cigars and offered one to Remus, who shook his head.

“Lily forced James into it.” Remus explained what James had told him about it.

After hearing what Lily had done, Sirius discovered that his lukewarm feelings towards Lily had now pretty much changed to feelings of disgust. “I suppose she didn’t expect it to backfire on her like that.”

“I doubt it.” Remus discerned that Sirius wasn’t that upset about what he’d found out. “You’re really not bothered about how James’ felt about you, are you?”

“I’m not offended by it, no. But I am upset that James had to put up with Lily’s shit.” Sirius quantified what he was feeling. “Despite what you’ve just said, James has never done anything to make me feel uncomfortable, and I doubt he ever would.”

“He said that he’d have never acted on his feelings.” Remus revealed. “Feelings which I know are long in the past. And I also know you’re the only man I know he’s ever felt like that about.”

Sirius couldn’t help but grin. “What can I say? Not only am I one of a kind but I’m also irresistible to men and women alike.”

Remus just shook his head. “You do realize that if I had a packet of crisps handy you’d be wearing them right now, don’t you?” Noticing that the bottle of wine was already almost empty, he stood up. “And another thing, there’s one man who doesn’t find you irresistible.”

“Harry?” Sirius quipped.

“No, me, you great lummo.” Remus got up. “I think you need some food.”

“Remus?” Sirius called out in a hesitant tone.

Remus turned around. “Yes?”

“You know you love me really.” Sirius grinned widely.

Remus scowled. “I’ll be back with those crisps.”

Seven hours later, Sirius tried to unlock his front door, his wand falling from his hand. Remus sighed and unholstered his own wand. “Let me.”

Sirius grinned stupidly at his friend. “I love you, you know.”

“Of course you do.” Remus supported Sirius inside to find a worried Faith rushing as fast as she could towards them.

“Is he alright?” Faith halted as she sniffed. “He’s drunk?”

“You might say that.” Remus kept his arm around Sirius, who by now was beginning to close his eyes. “Where do you want him?”

"The floor." Faith scowled at Sirius. "You were supposed to be home from work three hours ago. I've got Harry and Cassandra out searching for you." Sirius opened his eyes as Faith shouted at him before smiling and closing them again.

"He was supposed to have sent you a message." Remus had deliberately told Sirius to do it while he'd gone to use the bathroom. "I should have known better than to trust him to do that."

Faith turned her gaze on Remus. "And you should have known better than to get him drunk in the first place."

"Sorry." Remus responded a little sheepishly.

Faith backpedaled at the look on Remus' face. "Listen to me. At one time I'd have been the first one to have some fun without giving a damn who I was upsetting." She gave Remus a dry smile. "Can you put him in the blue room for me? I'm not sleeping with him smelling like that."

Remus bodily lifted Sirius up over his shoulder in a fireman's lift. "Do you have a hangover potion I can leave out for him?"

Faith wasn't feeling quite that generous. "He can find his own hangover potion in the morning."

Cassandra and Harry chose that moment to apparate in. "Dad!" Cassandra, like Faith, thought something was wrong, and went to rush forward.

Harry knew straight away what was wrong with Sirius. "He's drunk, Cass. I can smell it from here."

Cassandra gripped the table to the side of her in relief. "I thought something had happened to him."

"Something is going to happen to him in the morning." Faith remarked on seeing how pale Cassandra had gone. She turned to Harry. "Can you summon all of the hangover potions in the house?"

Harry did as Faith asked, smirking as she pocketed them. "You are one scary woman."

"I know." Faith grinned at Harry. "Remus, can you please deal with him?"

"Give him here." Harry held out his arms. "I can apparate him up."

"I've got him." Remus easily carried Sirius up the stairs, and called back. "And besides if I fall down, he'll never know."

Harry turned to Faith. "Are you alright?"

"Just relieved more than anything." Faith slowly made her way into the sitting room. "Thanks for going to look for him."

"He'd have done the same for me." Harry made sure that Faith was sitting comfortably. "Is there anything I can get you before I leave?"

"Nothing at all." Faith smiled as Cassandra kissed her on the cheek. "Don't worry about your Dad. I'll give him a potion eventually."

"I wouldn't." Now that her fear had subsided, Cassandra was feeling more than a little angry towards her father. "Goodnight Faith."

"Goodnight." Faith watched Harry and Cassandra disappear just as Remus came back downstairs. "So why did he get that drunk?"

"We found out that we think James might have gotten married." Remus didn't sit down as he didn't intend to stay.

"James Potter?" Faith's mouth fell open. "To Tonks?"

"Yep. We sort of had a little celebration." Remus wasn't going to mention anything to Faith about what else they'd discussed unless Sirius did.

“Drat.” Faith glanced up at Remus. “I feel bad about hiding the hangover potions now.”

“I’d still do it.” Remus winked at Faith. “It’s fun to watch Sirius try and make a batch while he’s battling a hangover. I’m going to go. If you need anything, holler.”

“I will.” Faith kissed Remus on the cheek as he bent over. “And thanks for bringing him home.”

“Someone had to.” Remus then disappeared, using his emergency portkey to get home, as even though he was sober enough to walk, he didn’t trust himself to apparate in one piece.

The Next Day

Harry put down his wine glass. “Cass, I really need to make a move now.”

“It’s going to be horrible without you.” Cassandra pouted. “And Dad is going to be a bear tomorrow; you know he will.”

“Just remind him of how bloody irresponsible he was yesterday; that should shut him up.” Harry grinned. “He’s not going to fire you.”

“I wouldn’t bet on it.” Cassandra sighed heavily. “Three weeks is going to seem like forever. Who am I going to have to watch TV with and keep me company?”

“Sirius said you could go back home and stay with him and Faith.” Harry reminded her. “And the Fidelius is still in place, so you’ll be fine if you decide to stay here.”

“I know that but it won’t be the same.” Cassandra knew she was whining.

“I’ll be back before you know it.” Harry stood up. “Now give me a hug.”

Cassandra went into Harry's arms. "Be careful."

"I will." Harry promised. "And I think it's the students you should be warning, not me."

Despite her misery, Cassandra grinned. "Are you going to be nice to them at all?"

"Probably." Harry let Cassandra go. "I'm a guest teacher, and not a resident, so I don't have quite as much as leeway as I would here."

"I know that Michaela and Jacques will have a surprise when they see how good you are." Cassandra couldn't resist crowing about Harry's abilities. "Dad said that they were really pissed when he said that Altus couldn't do the training like the last time."

"Wearing a cloak all the time was a little oppressive." Harry had therefore made the decision to go as himself. "Hopefully they'll warm to me when they realize that I'm not the youthful pushover they're expecting."

"Dad said you're going to be holding a demonstration with some of the French Aurors." Cassandra wished she could see it but Sirius had refused.

"Jacques requested it." Harry checked his pocket to make sure his suitcase was still there. "I'm sure he's convinced his men will wipe the floor with me."

Cassandra giggled. "I've had a two hundred galleon bet with Dad that you'll beat them in less than three minutes; he said at least five."

"I'll make sure you win then." Harry kissed Cassandra on the nose. "Cass, I've really got to go now. I need to check in and sort my things out so that I'm ready for tomorrow morning."

"I'll see you in three weeks." Cassandra stepped away from Harry.

“You can count on it.” Harry activated his portkey and vanished.

Cassandra picked up her favorite toy, the stuffed wolf Harry had bought her. “It looks as though it’s just you and me for a movie tonight.” Laughing at herself, she switched the TV on.

Next Chapter: Harry puts on a display, and makes a new friend and an enemy; Cassandra gains an admirer; Thomas' quest for the Cartouches becomes easier.

Chapter 34: Demonstration

29th November 2004

United States Auror Division Headquarters

Harry made his way down the corridor, his cloak flaring out behind him. Earlier that morning he'd given a demonstration where he'd taken on six of the French Auror Division's supposedly best undercover operatives, and he'd ended it within three minutes as he'd promised Cassandra he would. Now he found himself summoned to a meeting with Michaela Bradford, the head of USAD, and Jacques Lafayette, the new head of le Ministère de la Défense, the French Auror Division.

Michaela opened the door to her office at Harry's knock. "Come and sit down, Auror Sebastian. It's good of you to agree to spend some time with us in Altus' place."

As Harry sat down, he noted that in comparison to when he'd been there as Altus, Michaela Bradford was a little more reserved with him this time. Up until that moment, he'd actually been dealt with by her assistant, Matthias Augustine. "You're more than welcome, Chief Bradford, and do call me Harry."

Michaela felt obliged to offer the same courtesy in return. "In that case I think you'd better call me Michaela. And this is Jacques Lafayette, head of MDD."

The two men exchanged polite greetings before Jacques got down to business.

"Harry, if I may also call you that; that was quite a show you put on today. Would you care to share how you managed to enfold what looked like three spells at once?" Jacques, Henri's replacement, knew that the spell existed from Henri but this was the first time he'd seen it in real life. "And please call me Jacques."

“I’ve already said that I’ll do that, Jacques.” Harry was pissed that Jacques had only agreed two days earlier to allow some of his men to attend USAD, so he found himself being a little short with the Frenchman. “As agreed with Chief Bradford, I’ll be going through the technique and doing some practice with the senior Aurors from USAD on Wednesday morning. Your men are more than welcome to sit in on it.”

“That would be helpful.” Jacques had by now determined that despite his apparent youth, Harry was no soft touch. “What else are you going to be doing during your stay?”

“While several of our teachers take a vacation, Harry has agreed to step in and teach a class for all of our trainees, every afternoon during the week and on Saturday mornings, to discuss and demonstrate the defense techniques that BritAD employs.” Michaela explained. “A few of your men are also welcome to attend these if you so wish.”

“I do not think that will be necessary.” Jacques declined. “Our teachers are among the best in the world, and I believe this was reflected in the performance of my team. Tell me, Harry, what was your opinion of them?”

Harry was aware that his comments wouldn’t be well received despite the polite front Jacques was displaying. “Jacques, while I have nothing but respect for you and your men, I will tell you that two of their biggest problems were that their technique was shoddy, and they lacked cohesion, which is why I beat them today.”

As Harry had correctly assumed, Jacques wasn’t pleased. “I believe that you beat them because you know a trick they do not, and not because they do not come up to your standards.”

“I’d be willing to repeat the demonstration again.” Harry offered. “And this time I won’t use my ‘trick’ as you so politely put it. But I can guarantee the result will be the same.”

Michaela didn't have to be a werewolf to see that trouble was already brewing between the two men, both of whom thought they were right. "I've got an idea. I believe Harry's idea of repeating the demonstration is an excellent one, provided he doesn't use the threefold spell. However, this time, perhaps he should take on three of your men and three of mine."

Jacques mulled the idea over for a moment before smiling. "I too think that it is an excellent idea."

"Will tomorrow morning at ten be acceptable, Harry?" Michael turned to Harry.

"It will." Harry hid his smile as he sensed that Jacques was feeling more than confident.

"Michaela, until tomorrow then. Harry, I will see you at dinner tonight." Jacques stood up and took his leave, a smirk on his face as he knew exactly who he wanted to take Harry on. And this time he was going to cut him no slack in the face of his youth, as he believed he had done with his choice of Harry's opponents that morning.

Michaela stared at Harry's almost implacable face. "You believe that you're going to win again, don't you?"

Harry finally smiled. "I know I am." He too then stood up. "As Jacques said, until tomorrow, Ma'am."

"I'll see you at ten a.m." Michaela dismissed Harry, and began to scan her list of possible opponents, one already picked out in her mind.

The Next Day

Just before ten a.m. Harry found himself in the large auditorium once more. However this time, instead of just the trainees, it appeared as if every person in USAD had come out to observe.

Harry muttered something rude under his breath before using 'Sonus' and addressing the audience. "Good morning. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Harry Sebastian, and I'm the assistant head at BritAD. What you are about to see is a demonstration of how to use simple techniques to overcome even the most qualified Auror. During this demonstration, at no time will I use anything more than the Accio and Stupefy spells against any of the Aurors' persons."

Harry could see disbelief on the faces of the audience. He could also hear both whispered bets and disdainful comments being made about him. Harry ignored all of this, and continued speaking. "I believe that three Aurors from USAD and three from MDD will be helping me today."

At Harry's announcement, three cream and brown clad Aurors stepped out, one, a willowy black girl, was wearing a scarlet band on her arm. Harry frowned as he realized that this meant that she was a third year trainee.

Emily Bradford could see that Harry wasn't happy to be taking on a trainee. "You needn't worry, Auror Sebastian, I am top of my class. I'm Emily Bradford, this is Auror Leigh Strang and Auror Glen Nero."

Harry nodded politely. "Trainee Bradford, gentlemen." Harry then turned to see the black and white clad Aurors from MDD enter the auditorium behind him. He was entirely unsurprised to see Jacques Lafayette in their number; in fact he'd been banking on it. "Bonjour, Jacques, Messieurs."

"Good morning, Harry." Jacques returned the gesture. "May I introduce Destin Simon and Gage Moreau?"

Harry inclined his head. "A pleasure."

As the senior person there, Jacques took point for the group. "What are the rules, Harry?"

“No lethal spells or curses that cannot be countered, and as agreed, I will of course, refrain from using the threefold spell I used yesterday. Is this acceptable?” Harry addressed his question to all six opponents.

After each one of them had indicated their acceptance, Harry set out the remainder of his terms. “I will take up position in the center of the auditorium. You may stand wherever you wish to. The only proviso I will make is that you must be at least twenty feet away from me to start.”

Harry had already assessed the attitudes of the various Aurors. He’d found that Jacques, Emily and Glen Nero were extremely confident and he expected this to be their undoing. However, Strang and Moreau were betraying some nerves and Harry had decided if he could, he’d take them down first. Harry deduced that Destin Simon would be his biggest challenge, as he wasn’t overconfident nor was he nervous in any way. Harry knew why, and decided to use it against the Auror.

Harry took up his position and waited for the six to move to their chosen spots. Harry was pleased to see that Strang and Moreau were actually standing quite close together, with Nero flanking them. Behind him, Emily, Jacques and Simon had also taken up their positions. Harry addressed Michaela. “Chief Bradford, if you would be so good as to count down from five. We will begin on your mark.” Harry then removed the Sonorus spell.

Michaela Bradford applied the same spell to herself. “Aurors, Trainee, are you ready?”

All seven of them bowed. Michaela resisted smiling at her daughter. “Five, four, three, two, one, mark.”

Before Michaela had even finished saying the word ‘mark’, Harry had hit the floor, and withdrawn both of his wands. “Tempestas Imber Maximus Ter.” Harry heard Destin Simon calling out a spell of his own as Harry sent the overpowered thunderstorm heading behind him, and rolled to his feet, while shouting out his second spell. “Caliga Demo Respiro Cogo”; this time sending it in front of him as he moved towards the Aurors he’d sent the spell at. After using both natural

agility and a shield to overcome the three stupefy spells heading his way, Harry turned his wand on himself, performing a bubble head charm, before disappearing into the airless darkness in front of him.

Behind him, as Harry had heard, only Destin had had time to react as the thunderstorm hit, performing a weather repelling charm upon himself. But even then, the noise of the thunderstorm that still raged around him and the others, had drowned out whatever it was that Harry was doing before he'd disappeared into an inky void. Destin decided to turn his attention to dispelling the storm before Harry re-emerged. To his left, Emily and Jacques had both been taken unawares as the same storm had enveloped them, leaving them deaf and blind to what was happening around them.

Meanwhile, inside the darkness, Harry knew he'd have little time before Destin managed to overcome his spell. Using his enhanced eyesight, Harry saw the shapes of two of the Aurors hitting the floor, their lungs finally exhausted of oxygen. Harry had been aware that the blackness spell combined with the oxygen depletion spell had managed to confuse their senses, and neither of them had countered either spell before they'd collapsed. As Harry expected, Nero had obviously used the same spell as him. Harry grinned, as with his superior vision, he could see Nero but Nero couldn't see him. Harry used this to his advantage, as before his time ran out, he sent stupefy after stupefy flying through the air. He then used the Accio spell on all three Aurors, shrinking and pocketing all six wands as they flew into his hand. Only then did he cancel both the bubblehead charm on himself, and the Caligo spell, which allowed oxygen to rush back into the small space Harry had selected the spell to operate within.

Harry became aware that his window of opportunity had come to an end when he'd had to drop and roll as a Reducto spell narrowly missed his shoulder. He knew without looking that it had come from Destin Simon, who had aimed into the darkness, rather than dispelling it, hoping to hide his actions from Harry. Harry hurriedly aimed one of his wands at himself, and whispered in an almost indiscernible voice "Contego Auris", before dispelling the darkness. By using the Auris spell on himself, Harry had now become effectively deaf as three spells flew towards him, but using his knowledge of what the spells were by sight, he managed to deflect them.

The final one, however, a blasting spell delivered by Jacques, made Harry step back slightly as it resounded against his shield. Harry decided the time had come to take Jacques out of the equation, and he aimed his wand at the floor in front of Jacques. "Serpensortia Quinquiplico Jugiter." Harry hissed in parseltongue at the snakes that appeared. "Attack him." Harry then totally ignored Jacques, aware that the Auror would be too busy to attack him while firing off spells at the five snakes that were making their way across the floor towards him. Harry was proven correct as Jacques killed one, only to find that five more had appeared to take its place.

Free to deal with his last two opponents, Harry fired off a stupefy spell at Emily with one wand before throwing up a shield to avoid Destin's heart stopping spell. Almost at the same time, Harry aimed his other wand at the floor. "Humus Labefactus Promittus." The ground in front of Harry then began to shake violently and the tremors spread out and away from him, knocking all three Aurors off their feet, allowing the snakes to swarm over Jacques. Harry felt sorry for the Auror but he knew that he'd have to wait to deal with him, as he needed to use the distraction to deal with Destin.

To do so, Harry aimed his wand into the air above Destin's head and whispered almost silently. "Undisonus Sonitus."

Moments later, Emily managed to overcome the Humus spell first, and fired off a Reducto spell, which Harry deflected. Her success was mainly because Destin had given up on the counterspell as the effects of the Sonitus spell hit him, causing him to drop his wands and clap his hands over his ears, as he literally doubled up in pain. Harry sent a blasting spell at the floor in front of Emily before taking aim at Destin. "Stupefy. Accio Destin's wands." Harry then dispelled the Sonitus spell.

Emily meanwhile began to return blasting spells of her own, aiming at Harry instead of the floor. Harry chose to dodge them rather than defending against them, before turning his wand on the floor in front of Emily. "Aqua Congelo." Emily yelled loudly as the floor around her feet became slick with ice.

Harry saw her struggling to stay upright as he finished dealing with Jacques, who was by now was screaming at the top of his lungs, something Harry couldn't hear due to his muffled hearing. "Stupefy. Accio Jacques' wands."

Jacques was now mercifully unaware of the snakes that were writhing over his body. Harry hissed at them. "Stop now, and become one." The snakes withdrew, amassing into one bunch which Harry easily vanished after dropping the multiplication spell, which in his panic Jacques hadn't been able to do. Harry had deliberately chosen this spell to use on Jacques, as his wife had unwittingly revealed her husband's fear of snakes to Harry at dinner the previous night.

Harry then restored his hearing, just as he heard a stupefy spell being cast, and instead of dropping to the floor or raising a shield, as he knew Emily expected him to, he leapt high into the air, the spell passing harmlessly several feet below him. As he landed, instead of remaining upright, Harry dropped to lie flat on the floor before aiming his wand at Emily, who was lying on the large patch of ice that she had deigned to ignore in favor of firing spells at Harry. "Accelero Accio Emily."

Emily managed to hold onto her wands as she shot across the icy ground towards Harry. However the impact of slamming into Harry at high speed ensured that the wands were dislodged from her grasp. Harry grimaced as he heard a snap telling him he'd probably broken Emily's leg where she'd connected with his much harder skeleton. "Do you yield, Trainee Bradford?" Harry held his wands to her throat.

Emily had broken out into a cold sweat from the pain in her leg, and she wanted nothing more than for the pain to end. "I yield, Auror Sebastian."

Harry smiled at her before casting a field dressing spell on the distressed girl's leg. "That should stop the bone from moving. Stay here until the Healers arrive."

Harry then enervated the others, pulling them to their feet one by one and shaking hands with them.

When he enervated the head of MDD, he found that Jacques was shaking almost uncontrollably. Harry reached into his pocket. "Take this. It's anti-venom."

Jacques took it. "Merci, Harry." He then shook Harry's hand. "You are a sly bastard, and I have no idea how you knew about my phobia, but I think I like you."

Harry grinned. "I'm glad to hear it. I'd sit down until the anti-venom takes effect."

"I will remain on my feet." Jacques wanted to sit down but pride kept him upright.

Harry then headed over to Destin Simon and enervated him before returning his wands. Before he could move away, Destin grasped his arm and asked Harry a question. "Who told you?"

"Now is not the time for this discussion." Harry said quietly.

Destin looked round. "I will speak to you some other time then." He then shook Harry's hand and left the auditorium.

Harry could hear people's comments in the audience, and Harry decided to address what he knew they were talking about. Using 'Sonus' but this time putting enough power into the spell so that he and everyone else could clearly hear each other, he turned to face them. "Does anyone have any questions?"

Several hands went up, and Harry pointed at one of the trainees. "State your name, and then give me your question."

"Trainee Duncan Starr." The sandy-haired, stockily built trainee stood up as he gave his name. "You said that you'd only be using 'Accio' and 'Stupefy'. Yet you used far more spells than that."

Harry knew that this question was probably the one most of them wanted answering. "If you'd listened carefully, Trainee Starr, you'd have heard me say I'd only be using two spells against the Aurors'

persons. If you think back, you'll note that all of the other spells I used were either directed into the air or onto the ground, and not against the Aurors themselves. The only spells I used directly against the Aurors were 'Stupefy' and 'Accio, just as I said I would."

As they realized they'd been cleverly misled, quite a few hands dropped down, leaving just a few remaining. Harry pointed to a red-headed girl. "Go ahead."

"Trainee Lucy Viking." The girl stood, as Duncan had. "How did you get the snakes to attack the Auror?"

"I told them to." Harry knew that that explanation wouldn't satisfy the girl.

Lucy was hard pushed not to snort. "You can talk to snakes?"

Harry lied. "No but I can give a few simple commands that I've learnt from someone who can."

"Can you demonstrate?" Lucy pushed.

Harry conjured up a large constrictor. "I'm going to tell it go to you. It won't attack you." Harry hissed at the snake. "Go to the red-headed one."

The snake dutifully slithered across the room, and up over the benches that lined the auditorum, before coiling itself at Lucy's feet. Lucy felt a little nervous at the size of it. Harry smiled. "You can get rid of it now."

Lucy carefully withdrew her wand and dispatched the snake. "How many things can you actually say to the snake, Sir?"

Harry noted that Lucy was now showing him some respect. "Including the command where I told the snake to go to you, I'd say about four or five. Any more questions?"

A tiny girl with blonde pigtails stood up. She reminded Harry of Luna. "Yes?"

"Auror Jenkins, Sir." The girl showed her respect for Harry immediately. "What did you do to Auror Simon?"

Harry found himself lying again, but this time to protect Auror Simon and not himself. "A quietly spoken air contracting spell which literally began to crush Auror Simon's head before I ended it."

"Thank you, Sir." Jenkins sat down.

Michaela Bradford stood up. "I think that will do for questions for now. I'm sure Auror Sebastian would like to shower as he has to teach a class today. And I'm sure he'll be willing to answer any questions the Trainees have then."

Tabitha Jenkins put her hand up again. "Excuse me, Ma'am."

"Yes, Auror Jenkins?" Michaela liked the small girl, who'd surprised everyone by passing the course with flying colors.

"I'm not on active duty this week, so I'd like to attend Auror Sebastian's class this afternoon, if I may." Tabitha requested.

"Granted." Michaela held up a hand as several more hands shot up, and picked out one more Auror she knew would use the classes wisely to attend. "Auror Jenkins and Auror Page may both attend for the entire three weeks' duration but no-one else."

Harry heard several groans, as the two who'd been selected were given jealous looks as they beamed at their friends, before getting up and leaving their seats. He knew that the two Aurors might well feel differently by the time he'd finished with them. "Thank you, Chief Bradford. Now if you'll all excuse me, as Chief Bradford rightly said, I need to shower before my class."

Harry then left the auditorium. He'd just reached the apparition area when he changed his mind, and he headed off in the direction of the

medical bay. Opening the door, he found Emily Bradford being flanked by Tabitha Jenkins and another girl he now knew to be Auror Page. "I'm sorry to interrupt but I wanted to check if you were alright."

"I am thank you, Sir." Emily was, however, still lying down. "Healer Calibri said that it's a relatively clean break, so I should be up and on my feet again in a few hours."

"I'm glad to hear it. Ladies." Harry inclined his head and set off towards the door, only to stop as Emily called out his name. "Yes?"

"We, that is Tabitha, Louise and I are all going out for a drink tonight. Would you like to join us, Sir?" Emily asked.

Harry hesitated. "If I accept, then I want you all to realize that I can't show any partiality towards you in the classroom, and should you ever have the misfortune to cross me, I'll have to deal with you as I would anyone else."

The three girls looked at each other before all three nodded, Tabitha answering verbally for them. "We understand, Sir."

Harry smiled. "In that case, shall we say seven o'clock back here?"

"We'll be waiting." Emily waited for Harry to leave before turning to her friends. "So what do you think?"

"Cute, very cute." Tabitha responded. "But I doubt he's going to fraternize with a trainee from his class."

"It can't hurt to find out." Emily grinned at her friends.

"Well as I'm not a trainee, he can fraternize with me anytime he likes." Louise sighed. "It's not the way he looks though. It's that British accent; I could just sit and listen to him talk all night."

"You mean whisper sweet nothings into your ear, don't you?" Emily teased her friend.

"You know me so well." Louise grinned at the three girls, who then burst into giggles.

As he walked away, Harry smiled to himself as he'd heard the remarks.

Later that night

Harry shook his head as he laughed. "You were quite the tomboy then."

Emily grinned. "Mum and Dad had so much trouble with me growing up. I know they despaired of my ever becoming a proper young lady. I think they were both relieved when I decided to enroll to become an Auror; I was finally going to put my more adventurous side to good use."

"I've seen your scores, so I'd say that they should be more than relieved." Harry complimented Emily. "Like you, Cass, Commander's Black's daughter, is also a high scoring Auror. I think it must run in the Auror genes."

"You're friends with her?" Louise asked, noting that Harry had shortened Cassandra's first name in a very familiar way.

"Yes." Harry took a sip of his coffee. "We've been friends for quite some time."

"So was she top of her class?" Tabitha had heard the rumor that Cassandra hadn't completed the course with everyone else.

Harry knew fishing when he heard it. "As you're probably all already aware, Cass completed her training within eight months outside of the usual scope of the Academy, and qualified with the third year trainees last August."

"How well did she do?" Emily couldn't help but ask, her competitive nature being what it was.

“She got some of the highest ever recorded scores except for in the final test.” Harry smiled as he thought about Cassandra. “Unfortunately she let her fears get in her way but she did complete it successfully.”

“So her test scores are better than mine then?” Emily knew that Cassandra had to be really clever if they were, as she herself had almost flawless test scores.

“I’m afraid so.” Harry could see that Emily was disappointed. “But Cassandra also did the same with her Hogwarts’ exams; the only difference with them, is that there was another friend of mine who managed to equal her in most of the subjects. But Mione, my other friend, took her exams five months earlier than she should have.”

“Are all of your friends prodigies?” Emily was beginning to feel a little lacking.

Harry apologized. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to belittle your own achievements. Being top of your year is quite an achievement.”

“No, I’m sorry.” Emily smiled ruefully. “I’m afraid I’m sometimes too competitive, which is how I ended up with a broken leg today.”

“I feel a little bad about that.” Harry admitted. “I think I overpowered the spell.”

“I think you must have.” Louise had winced as she’d heard the snap when her friend had collided with Harry. “That was quite a crack as Emily slammed into you. She must have caught your boot as she hit you.”

“Probably.” Harry couldn’t tell her Emily had actually slammed into his leg and not his foot, and that it was his body that had broken her leg.

“Enough about me. I want to know what spell you used on Auror Simon. You told us what you’d done but not the incantation.” Emily

hadn't heard the incantation; all she'd seen was the Auror collapse in pain.

"I'm afraid that's a secret." Harry smiled. "If I told you, I'd have to..."

"...kill me, I know." Emily ended Harry's sentence.

Harry finished his coffee. "Are you all ready?"

The three girls looked at each and nodded, Tabitha once more speaking for all of them. "We are. And thank you again for dinner, Harry. We didn't expect it. We were going to pick up a pizza on our way home this evening."

Harry had discovered that the three girls, together with Lucy Viking who was eating out with her parents that night, shared a house close to USAD. "After breaking Emily's leg, it was the least I could do." Harry held out Emily's chair so that she could get up. "At least the apparition point isn't too far away."

"Who told you about this restaurant?" Louise enquired as they weaved their way through the tables and towards the door.

"I've eaten here before." Harry revealed.

"When?" Louise wasn't aware that Harry had even been in the United States before.

"When Commander Black and I were here on an investigation." Harry didn't elaborate as they reached the apparition point. "Well ladies. Thank you for keeping me company this evening."

"We had a nice time." Emily sighed. "Tomorrow it's going to be back to formal address again isn't it?"

"It is." Harry confirmed. "And I'm afraid that I won't be cutting any of you any slack in the classroom either."

"We don't need it." Tabitha grinned cheekily. "Goodnight, Harry."

“Goodnight.” Harry shook hands with each of the girls. “I’ll see you all tomorrow in class.” He then waited until all three had vanished before disappearing himself.

On arriving back at the Muggle hotel he was staying in, Harry pulled off his boots, and glanced at the time, before deciding it was too late to watch television. After shedding his clothes, he slipped between the crisp sheets, and was soon fast asleep.

The next day he was heading for class when he was stopped by Destin Simon. “Bonjour, Auror Simon.”

“Bonjour, Auror Sebastian.” Destin pulled Harry to the side and erected a privacy bubble. “So as I asked you yesterday, who told you what I am? No-one except for Jacques knows.”

“I knew.” Harry wasn’t going to deny it but he also wasn’t going to reveal the truth of how he knew.

Destin told Harry how he thought Harry had known. “I thought at first that you had to be a werewolf, as not only were you almost as fast at sending that spell at me as I was in defending myself but you also knew what I was. However, I changed my mind as you do not smell like a werewolf. So how did you do it?”

“As you’ve just pointed out, I was almost as fast, but not as fast.” Harry responded, glad that he hadn’t used his advanced abilities within sight of Destin. He was also grateful to Remus and Grimstock for the potion that masked what he was. “And it’s done through practice, and through people’s misconceptions. You all expected me to fire at you, and not above you. You also were only expecting stupefy spells and nothing more. Like everyone else, I don’t believe any of you truly listened to what I said.”

“I did not.” Destin admitted. “But I would still like to know what spell you used on me, as I know it is not what you told everyone else.”

Harry was more than conscious that Destin would have known he was lying. "I used the 'Sonitus' spell; I just varied it a little."

"But that is used to mask conversations with noise." Destin exclaimed. "And it was a clever way of taking me down."

"Sometimes the simplest spells are the most effective, Destin." Harry held out his hand. "I'm sorry to have to end this conversation but I have a class to attend. However, you may rest assured that I will tell no-one of your abilities."

"Thank you, Harry." Destin shook hands with Harry. "I hope we meet again."

"You won't be at dinner tonight?" Harry was having dinner once again with Jacques, his wife and some of the Aurors, and had expected Destin to attend.

Destin shook his head. "I am returning to Paris in a moment but Gage and Jacques are to remain together with some of the junior Aurors. My daughter, Francine, is to give a demonstration at school tonight, and my wife will be very unhappy if I do not attend."

Harry understood. "I hope it goes well for her. Now if you'll excuse me, I really do need to get to my class. I don't want to set a bad example by being later than the students."

Destin knew it was a job he wouldn't have wanted. "I do not envy you having to teach."

"I must have been bad in another life." Harry quipped as Destin dropped the privacy bubble. "Have a safe journey home."

"I hope your teaching goes well." Destin then walked off in the opposite direction.

After Harry finished the lesson, he wasn't entirely surprised when the three girls, together with Lucy, asked him out again. He declined,

stating his dinner with Jacques as his reason. He did, however, agree to go bowling with the girls during the next evening.

2nd December 2004 - The Island

Thomas read through the report he'd received from one of his American contacts and frowned, before getting up and going to find his wife. "Mione, I'm sorry but I have to go to New York."

Mione perked up. "Do you mind if I come along?"

"I may not be around much." Thomas warned. "But of course you may."

"When are you going?" Mione asked.

"In about ten minutes." Thomas told her as they walked towards his room. "I won't be taking the twins with us."

"It's Theresa's weekend to work, so that's okay." Mione thought quickly. "I just need five minutes to pack, and to tell her we'll be gone, and where to contact us. Where are we staying, and for how long?"

"The Plaza, and I'm not sure for how long. Tell Theresa until Sunday night, and that way we are covered." Thomas swept into his room. "I'll apparate us both directly to New York."

Mione hesitated. "Are you sure? It's quite a long way."

"It's no problem for me." Thomas kissed her cheek. "Now go pack."

Once Mione had left, Thomas debated his options, and decided that it wouldn't hurt to take Mione to his meeting with him, once he'd briefed his contact on exactly how far he could discuss things.

After packing, Thomas apparated into Mione's bedroom to find her almost ready. "Can I help?"

Mione sent a grateful smile at her husband but shook her head. "I just need to throw my make-up bag in and I'm ready."

Thomas waited patiently as Mione threw that, together with a few other last minute things she realized she needed into her suitcase, before shrinking it for her and wrapping his arms around her waist. "Are you ready?"

Mione shivered as Thomas' lips brushed her neck. "Yes."

The two disappeared.

3rd December 2004 - USAD

Harry picked up his folders, aware that four of his class had remained behind. "Trainees. Aurors. Is there something I can help you with?"

"A group of us are going to a pizza parlor tonight. And then to a nightclub." Emily wasn't put off by Harry's formal address. "We were wondering if you wanted to come along."

Harry was about to say yes when a knock sounded on the door to the classroom, and the door opened. Harry's face split into a huge smile as the instigator of the noise walked into the room. "Auror Black."

Noting the presence of others, Cassandra responded in a similar fashion to Harry. "Auror Sebastian. I hope I'm not disturbing anything."

Harry walked over to Cassandra. "Not at all. Auror Cassandra Black meet Trainees Emily Bradford and Lucy Viking, and Aurors Tabitha Jenkins and Louise Page."

Cassandra shook hands with all of the girls. "Is class still in session? I thought it was over."

Louise disabused her of her notion. "It is. Emily was just telling Auror Sebastian that a group of us are going out for pizza and then to a nightclub, and we hoped he'd join us. Perhaps you'd care to join us as well."

Cassandra glanced at Harry but was unable to gauge his feelings. "I don't have anything planned for tonight but I can't speak for Auror Sebastian."

Harry stuck to his original decision. "Neither have I. So where shall we meet everyone?"

Tabitha wrote down the name of the restaurant. "Seven o'clock."

"We'll be there." Harry promised.

The girls walked out and Cassandra turned to Harry. "I didn't make a mistake did I?"

Harry shook his head. "I had intended to say yes; well to the pizza place anyway."

Cassandra followed Harry out of the classroom, waiting as he locked it. "I won't be stepping on anyone's toes, will I, by coming along?"

Harry knew what Cassandra was trying to politely ask. "No, you won't, Auror Black." Harry kept his tone formal as people passed by them. "Where are you staying?"

"The Plaza." Cassandra informed Harry as they walked quickly up the corridor.

"The same hotel I'm staying in." Harry opened the door for Cassandra.

Cassandra looked round to check no-one could hear them, before giving an impish grin as they reached the apparition point. "I managed to get the room next to yours."

"I'll see you in my room then." Harry waited for Cassandra to leave. "Go ahead."

Cassandra vanished and reappeared in her bedroom, knocking on the door that linked her room to Harry's. Harry opened it. "Come in."

Cassandra noted that Harry's room was identical to hers except for a reverse layout. "When I arrived today I didn't expect to find you with a fan club."

Harry laughed. "They've pretty much taken me under their wing."

"So which one are you after?" Cassandra's light tone belayed her inner turmoil.

"What makes you think I'm after any of them?" Harry avoided answering the question directly.

"Harrrry!" Cassandra dragged out his name. "Just tell me."

Harry finally gave in and told her. "I sort of like the one who doesn't like me."

"And that would be whom?" Cassandra had hoped that Harry would have said none of them. "As they all seemed to like you."

"I meant like as in a romantic sense." Harry told her. "And that would be Tabitha."

"The teeny little one who looks a little like Luna?" Cassandra checked that she'd gotten the right girl.

"That would be the one." Harry changed the subject as he could sense that Cassandra wasn't entirely happy with the discussion. "So tell me, how did you manage to get Sirius to let you come out?"

"He made me cry on Monday." Cassandra had actually pushed Sirius until he had. "And he was feeling guilty about upsetting me on Saturday, so it wasn't that hard."

Harry smirked. "There's a sucker born every day."

“Sometimes you have to resort to slightly underhand tricks to get what you want.” Cassandra grinned widely at Harry before handing over a bulky letter. “This is from Dad.”

Harry opened it, and pulled out a large pile of parchment, most of which pertained to reports but one piece caught his attention. “He’s appointed me as your guardian for this trip.”

Cassandra was a little taken aback. “Why would he do that? I’m twenty-one now.”

“I know that; I was at your party if you remember.” Harry reminded Cassandra. “And there’s a very good reason for him appointing me.”

Having a feeling she wasn’t going to like it, Cassandra sighed. “What is it?”

“You’re joining the classes here for the duration of your stay.” Harry watched Cassandra’s face fall. “So I don’t think Sirius is quite the sucker we took him for. He’s appointed me to be your guardian, because if you’re seriously injured in any way, then I’ll be able to act as your medical liaison at the hospital.”

“I thought I’d be able to enjoy myself. Instead I’m going to be in classes.” Cassandra wasn’t happy about what Sirius had done. “Do I get any time off at all?”

“Exactly the same as me.” Harry informed her. “Which would be Saturday afternoon, and Sundays.”

“So I’d best enjoy myself tonight then.” Cassandra headed back to her room. “I’m going to shower. I’ll be ready by seven.”

“I hope so; we’re supposed to be at the pizza place by then.” Harry went to his wardrobe and picked out something suitable to wear, before heading into the shower as well.

When they arrived at the pizza place, Harry found himself shunted into a seat next to Emily while Cassandra ended up at the end of the

table next to Duncan Starr, who Harry easily deduced had taken a fancy to Cassandra. At the end of the meal, Harry paid for his and Cassandra's food, the two of them electing to share a pizza.

Although he'd intended to leave after the pizza, Harry found himself and Cassandra following the group into the nightclub. Once inside, Harry ended up seated between Louise and Tabitha, as Cassandra was dragged off to dance by Emily and Lucy. Harry talked quietly with the two girls, neither of whom had shown inclination to get up and dance. After answering a question from Louise, Harry looked up in time to see Duncan slide an arm around Cassandra, manipulating her onto the dance floor and into his arms.

From where he was, Harry could see that Cassandra looked uncomfortable. After a minute, it was evident to Harry that Cassandra was obviously not enjoying herself, so Harry excused himself, and headed towards the dance floor.

Duncan had just had his hand moved back to Cassandra's waist from her bottom yet again, when he felt a tap on his shoulder. "Auror Sebastian."

"You don't mind if I cut in, do you?" Harry's tone said that he didn't care if Duncan did.

"Not at all, Sir." Duncan stepped away and released Cassandra.

Cassandra slid gratefully into Harry's embrace. "He wouldn't take no for answer."

"So I noticed." Harry responded shortly. "Are you alright?"

"I am now." Cassandra smiled brightly at Harry, and diverted the topic away from her, and onto one of the girls who'd been sitting next to Harry. "So considering you said that Tabitha doesn't like you, I didn't see her straying from your side tonight."

"She's just being friendly." Harry maneuvered Cassandra to where there was a little more room. "As was Louise."

Cassandra looked over to where she knew Louise had been sitting, and noticed that three of the girls were now watching her and Harry. "We seem to be under scrutiny."

"They're probably trying to figure out what our relationship really is." Harry was used to it by now.

"Well, if you're interested in Tabitha, perhaps you'd better tell her that we're just friends." Cassandra suggested.

Harry looked down at Cassandra. "Perhaps I should, as she's quite pleasant company. But then again, all four girls are."

"Have you spent much time with them?" Cassandra enquired.

Harry nodded. "We went bowling last night and out to dinner last Tuesday night. But I have to admit that I thought I'd upset Emily when we were at dinner as she wasn't happy that I was boasting about how well you did in your exams, both as an Auror and a student."

"You boasted about me?" Cassandra couldn't keep the surprise out of her voice.

"Well, not just you. Mione as well." Harry responded blithely, unaware that that wasn't what Cassandra wanted to hear.

The song ended and Cassandra expected Harry to let her go. "Aren't we sitting down?"

"You can if you want to." Harry offered. "But as I didn't get to dance with you on your birthday, I think you owe me a dance, and the last one was only half of one."

Cassandra had been annoyed at her party that she hadn't been able to dance with Harry who, despite attending for some of it, had had to leave early to attend an emergency, allowing Sirius to remain. "In that case, I think I'll stay here with you." Cassandra replaced her hands on Harry's shoulders.

Instead of keeping his hands on Cassandra's waist as he had done for the previous dance, Harry slid them further around until they rested on the small of her back. "Is this alright? It's a little more comfortable holding you like this."

"It's fine." Cassandra found that the change in position had brought her and Harry closer together, and she now became very much aware of him. As they moved slowly on the spot, Cassandra tentatively rested her head against Harry's shoulder. "My neck aches keeping my head upright."

"It's okay, Cass. You can lean against me." Harry found his nose was now being assaulted by the smell of Cassandra's citrus shampoo, and he unconsciously pulled Cassandra even closer to him so that her body contacted his.

Cassandra relaxed totally against Harry, her breasts squashed slightly against his chest, and she closed her eyes, enjoying how he felt against her.

Again the music ended, but this time neither of them said anything, merely remaining in place until the next record began.

Up at the table, Duncan scowled as he saw how closely Cassandra was dancing with Harry. "Just great."

Louise Page laughed out loud. "You really thought that she was going to fall for your patter, and you'd be able to add another notch to your bedpost, didn't you Duncan?"

Duncan turned his scowl on the red-head. "I know she was going to, Page."

Louise smirked and held out her hand. "Twenty galleons that you can't get her to sleep with you, Starr."

"You're on." Duncan shook hands. "But you're not to interfere in any way."

“What’s the matter, Duncan?” Lucy baited him. “Is my big brother afraid that one girl isn’t going to fall for his charms?”

“She will, Viking.” Duncan responded. “They always do.”

“Well it doesn’t look as if they’re working right now.” Louise nodded towards the dance floor. “I think his are.”

“Oh shut up.” Duncan walked off to the sound of Louise’s laughter.

Tabitha chose that moment to return from the bathroom and, on spotting how closely Harry was dancing with Cassandra, she frowned. “Harry said that they were just friends.”

“I’d say very good friends looking at that.” Louise glanced at Cassandra and Harry again. “You saw how attentive he was at dinner with her, even from halfway across the table. I also saw his face when he spotted Duncan dancing with her. I thought he was going to blow a gasket.”

Tabitha sighed. “Darn it. I liked him. I tried playing it cool but I think I overdid it.”

“Never mind.” Lucy patted her friend on the shoulder. “Duncan’s always free.”

Tabitha pulled a face. “I don’t think so. I’m sorry Lucy but he’s a pig.”

“You’re not the first girl to say that.” Lucy was more than aware of her brother’s shortcomings. “And I doubt that you’ll be the last.”

Louise decided to share out what she knew she’d be winning. “Tell you what. I’ve had a bet with Duncan that he can’t get Cassandra to sleep with him. So when I win the twenty galleons off him, I’ll take you all out to lunch with me. No matter how good Duncan’s charms are, I doubt very much whether our esteemed teacher is going to let Cassandra run off with him.”

Tabitha sighed. "I suppose lunch will have to do."

Over on the dance floor, the slow music finally ended, and Harry reluctantly let Cassandra go. "Do you want to go?"

Cassandra nodded, and let Harry lead her off the dance floor, and back to the table. "I'm afraid we're leaving. Cassandra will be joining the classes while she's here, and she's still a little tired after her portkey journey over. So we'll see you all in the morning at seven."

Lucy groaned. "Don't we get any leeway?"

"Absolutely not." Harry smiled at the girl. "I expect to see you bright eyed and bushy tailed at seven o'clock tomorrow morning."

Duncan stepped up to the table. "Goodnight, Sir. Cassandra."

Cassandra and Harry both bid him goodnight before making their way to the apparition point up the street. Cassandra shivered, making Harry turn to her in concern. "Are you cold?"

Cassandra shook her head. "No. I'm probably being silly but Duncan reminds me a little too much of Valdez."

"I admit he's a slimy young man but I doubt he's a Death Eater." Harry put his arm around Cassandra's shoulders. "But I can check him out if it would make you feel better."

"To be honest, it would." Cassandra wrapped her own arm around Harry's waist, leaning her head against him as she walked. "After Valdez, I just don't want to take any chances."

"Not thinking of dating Duncan were you?" Harry asked in a teasing voice.

Cassandra shuddered. "I'd rather date Malfoy."

"That would be a no then." Harry laughed. "Are you alright apparating on your own?"

“Yes, but you can do it.” Cassandra didn’t want to let go of Harry.

Harry apparated the two of them to his room. He expected Cassandra to release him, but instead she turned so that she was facing him and slipped her other arm around his waist to join its partner. Leaning against him she sighed. “I really missed you this week.”

“I only went on Sunday.” Harry nevertheless wrapped his arms around Cassandra. “But I missed you as well.”

Cassandra looked up, her brown eyes meeting Harry’s blue ones. “Harry, why don’t you ever go back to your natural eye color?”

“Because I’m in disguise.” Harry whispered conspiratorially.

Cassandra giggled at Harry’s sotto voce. “Can’t you change them, just this once?”

Harry touched his ring and his eyes reverted to their natural green and amber flecked state. “I bet I look different now, don’t I?”

Cassandra met his gaze again. “You do. It’s startling how different actually.”

Harry changed them back. “So how does that look?”

“Better.” Cassandra let go of Harry. “I’d best head off to bed.”

“You don’t want to watch any TV with me?” Harry asked in a plaintive voice.

“Too tired.” Cassandra kissed Harry’s cheek. “Goodnight.”

Harry bid Cassandra goodnight and got into bed, not bothering with the television.

The Plaza Hotel - Later that evening

Thomas picked up New York's version of the Prophet, the Herald, and began to skim through it as he leant back against the headboard of the bed. He became more focused, however, as his eyes fell upon a piece about the British Museum in London hosting an exhibition from Egypt in the early part of next year. He smiled to himself as he realized that this might be his best chance to obtain the Cartouches. He therefore decided to speak to Rupert about it after Christmas, as he also wanted to know how Rupert was doing finding the piece of the puzzle that Cammie had discovered existed. As Mione came out of the bathroom, Thomas put the paper down to take his wife into his arms.

Next Chapter: Thomas and Mione have dinner with Harry and Cassandra.

Chapter 35: A Very Bad Suggestion

Saturday 4th December 2004

After eating lunch, Harry apparated both him and Cassandra back to his hotel room. "So what do you want to do this afternoon?"

"Go for a walk in Central Park." Cassandra suggested. "After picking on me to be your classroom dummy this morning, you owe me."

"Bundle up then." Harry warned. "Even though it looks nice outside, it's still cold."

Cassandra nipped into her room to grab the Muggle coat she'd bought the previous winter. "Let's go then."

After pulling on a ski jacket, Harry opened his hotel room door. Then slinging his arm around Cassandra's shoulders, Harry led her to the elevator. "I hate these things."

"It's not as if you can't get out if there's a problem." Cassandra teased as she enjoyed the feeling of Harry holding her. "And I really want to go outside and walk around."

Harry could see how excited Cassandra was about it. "You look like a little marshmallow."

Cassandra pouted. "I'm nice and warm in this."

Harry grinned and kissed her nose just as the elevator doors opened. Both he and Cassandra turned to find themselves face to face with Mione and Thomas, who were both wearing long cashmere coats, with Thomas holding a briefcase.

Harry was completely taken aback. "Well, this is a surprise."

Thomas held his finger on the 'open doors' button so that the doors wouldn't close. "I'm in New York for a meeting. You?"

“Cass is here to attend some classes at USAD as a refresher.” Harry shepherded Cassandra into the elevator, keeping his arm around her. “And I’m teaching some classes on defense techniques.”

Mione slipped her hand into Thomas’ free one as he released the button. “How’s it going?”

The elevator reached the ground floor as Harry answered. “I’m sure you don’t want to hear about it.”

“I’m sure I do.” Mione remarked tartly.

Cassandra looked up at Harry, who still had his arm around her shoulders. “And you still haven’t told me about your demonstrations.”

“Demonstrations?” Thomas led his wife out of the elevator and stood to one side.

“It was nothing really.” Harry brushed it off.

Cassandra snorted. “What Harry’s not telling you is that on Monday he bested six of MDD’s men in less than three minutes, and then the next day he took on three Aurors from USAD and three from MDD and beat them in less than five. He just hasn’t told me how yet.”

“How do you know that?” Harry wasn’t surprised that Cassandra had heard something about the demonstrations, but he didn’t know she knew how quickly he’d done it.

“Lucy told me this morning while we had break.” Cassandra turned to Mione and Thomas. “Lucy’s a trainee.”

Thomas thought quickly. “Can you give me five minutes?”

Harry nodded. “Sure.”

Mione stayed with Harry and Cassandra as Thomas pulled out his cell phone and disappeared around the corner. “You two looked quite cozy just then. Are you dating?”

Cassandra shook her head. "Of course not. Harry was just teasing me about looking like a marshmallow." She looked wistfully at Mione's classic coat. "And compared to you he's right."

"Thomas bought it for me yesterday." Mione volunteered the information. "From Saks."

Cassandra really liked the coat. "Would you mind terribly if I copied you?"

Mione smiled at her friend. "Of course not. They also have it in both light and dark grey."

Thomas returned. "My business meeting has actually been cancelled, so instead I'm going to take Mione to the Museum of the City of New York."

Mione's face lit up at the news, and she had an idea. "What are you two doing today?"

"Going to Central Park and then to Saks." Cassandra looked sideways at Harry, who just smiled at her.

Mione had been about to ask them to join her and Thomas, but Thomas beat her to it. "As you're tied up this afternoon, would you care to join us for dinner tonight at Ovest instead? We've got a reservation for eight o'clock. I can phone and ask them to make it a table for four."

Cassandra answered for them. "We'd love to, wouldn't we, Harry?"

"We would." Harry had little choice except to accept. He'd fully intended to sit in and watch a movie with Cassandra.

"We'll meet you there then." Thomas took Mione's hand again.

Mione called back to her two friends. "It's located at 2315 Broadway."

Cassandra turned to Harry as the other couple left. "I'm really excited." Her hand flew to her mouth. "I've got nothing to wear."

Harry knew he had but in the light of who he was going to be dining with, decided to buy something new. "We can get you something from Saks when you buy a new coat. Central Park had better wait."

Six hours later Cassandra found herself sitting in front of her mirror as she got ready, her new dress hanging in a bag behind her door. She smiled as she looked at it again. Harry had ended up buying her not only a coat, but a dress, shoes, underwear, make-up and perfume. Cass had protested that she'd pay him back as, unlike Harry, she didn't own a Muggle credit card. And she didn't think Sirius would be very happy if she'd used the Ministry card she'd paid for her hotel room with, but Harry had just smiled and refused.

In his own hotel room, Harry slipped on his jacket, but shunned the idea of wearing a tie. Knocking on Cassandra's door, he waited for her to call out.

Cassandra finished putting on her lipstick. "I'll be about ten minutes, Harry."

"Okay." Harry went to the mini bar in his room and took out a beer before putting it back and taking out water instead.

Cassandra knocked on Harry's door a few minutes later, and poked her head around the door. "Can I come in?"

"Of course you can." Harry turned at Cassandra's voice, and discovered he was hard pressed to keep his mouth closed as Cassandra hesitantly came into the room.

Brushing a hand down the front of her dress, Cassandra tried to hide how nervous she was. "Does it look alright?"

"It looks fantastic on you." Harry couldn't take his eyes off her.

“Thank you.” Cassandra hadn’t been sure when she’d seen the simple black cocktail dress. But when she’d tried it on, she’d found that the fitted bodice of the dress, that then flared out slightly from her waist, had made her waist look considerably smaller than it was, as well as highlighting her very long legs. To complete the ensemble she’d found a pair of Prada T-Strap black sandals. She had, however, baulked a little when she’d seen the price of them but Harry had ignored her protests and added them to the pile.

Harry recovered himself and went over to the table to pick up a velvet box. “These are for you.”

Cassandra gasped as she opened the box to find not only earrings inside but a necklace and bracelet as well. “Harry, I can’t accept these.”

“Too bad.” Harry slipped out the gold hoops that Cassandra had put in, and replaced them with the white gold and onyx earrings from Gucci that he’d bought her. “They’re not returnable.”

Cassandra dutifully lifted her hair as Harry removed the simple gold necklace she’d been wearing to replace it with one to match the earrings. “Harry, these must have cost a fortune.”

“Not really, and with all the money I’ve made from the sale of the Basilisk, it’s not as if I couldn’t afford it if it was.” Harry crossed his fingers as he responded. Cassandra’s entire outfit, together with the jewelry, had actually set him back over ten thousand dollars but he wasn’t going to reveal that to her. Not once did Harry question himself as to why he’d spend that much on one outfit for a young woman he considered to be just a friend. “The sales lady suggested the jewelry when she saw the shoes you’d picked, so I bought it while you were picking out your underwear.”

Cassandra slipped on the bracelet before turning around to kiss Harry on the cheek. “Thank you. They’re absolutely perfect for this outfit.”

“I’m glad you like them.” Harry picked up the long winter coat he’d purchased before helping Cassandra into a dark grey version of the

coat Mione had been wearing. Personally Harry thought it looked better on Cassandra.

Cassandra picked up her hat and slipped on her gloves. "I think we're ready."

Harry apparated them to the closest apparition point on 81st Street, and the two of them walked from there.

Thomas and Mione were already seated in one of the large red booths when they arrived. Cassandra was glad she'd dressed up when she saw Mione's dark lilac fitted cocktail dress. She too had matching earrings and a necklace. "You look lovely."

"So do you." Mione hugged Cassandra before kissing her cheek.

Thomas smiled and kissed Cassandra on the cheek, surprising her. "Mione's right. You look very elegant, Cassandra."

"Thank you." Cassandra found herself seated next to Thomas as Harry slid in opposite her and sat down by Mione.

Thomas turned to Cassandra. "What would you like to drink?"

"White wine please." Cassandra felt a little intimidated but didn't know why.

"Wouldn't you prefer champagne?" Mione asked. "I know you like it."

Thomas noted what his wife suggested, and addressed the wine waiter who'd come up to the table. "I'd like another bottle of Le Mesnil Blanc de Blancs 85, thank you." He looked across at Harry. "Harry?"

"I'll have a Manhattan South." Harry liked the Bourbon cocktail.

The waiter poured out a glass of champagne from the bottle that was already standing at the side of the table for Cassandra, who then took a tentative sip, her face changing as the bubbles hit her tongue. "It takes creamy."

Harry had a feeling that Cassandra had absolutely no idea of how expensive the bottle of champagne was, and that she'd have been appalled if she'd known that the two bottles Thomas had so far ordered had cost more than her shoes. "It most certainly is. I find that the honey and citrus tends to make it what it is."

Thomas raised an eyebrow. "You appear to know your champagne, Harry."

"I just know what I like." Harry responded. "So tell me, Thomas, what business brought you here?"

"A lead that didn't pan out quite the way I expected." Thomas, however, didn't elaborate.

The waiter then came up to take their order. As the meal progressed, Harry found that he was drawn into conversation with Mione, as Thomas did the same with Cassandra.

After a glass of the champagne, Cassandra had relaxed, and found herself talking to Thomas about a broad range of subjects. As they finished coffee, the conversation turned to USAD, only to stop when a voice interrupted them. "Thomas, how nice to see you."

Thomas stood up, and held out his hand. "Nathan, it's good to see you as well."

Nathan shook it before kissing Mione on the cheek. "I didn't know you two were in New York."

"A business lead." Thomas smiled at the woman with Nathan. "Michaela, how lovely to see you again."

Not wanting to appear nosy, Harry hadn't initially looked up at the couple who'd stopped to greet Thomas and Mione. However, on hearing the name 'Michaela' he glanced up. "Michaela."

“Harry.” Michaela Bradford smiled. “This is a small world. This is my husband, Nathan Bradford.”

“Pleased to meet you, Sir.” Harry stood up and shook hands with the tall black man who dwarfed his wife by a good foot.

“You must be Harry Sebastian, Michaela’s latest guest teacher.” Nathan shook Harry’s hand firmly, when Harry confirmed that he was.

Michaela smiled at Cassandra. “I didn’t know that you two knew Thomas and Mione.”

“They were both originally friends of Mione before they became friends of mine.” Thomas addressed the couple in question. “You both obviously know Michaela but Nathan is head of the Foundation here in New York. Nathan, this is Cassandra Black.”

Cassandra smiled up at the man. “Dad’s mentioned you before, Sir.”

“Likewise.” Nathan smiled back at the pretty young woman. He turned to his wife. “You didn’t mention that Miss Black was over here.”

Michaela hadn’t thought to. “Cassandra is actually attending classes at USAD. Sirius thought she might like to see how things work over here, while Harry is teaching.”

“In that case, would you like to join us for dinner tomorrow night, Miss Black?” Nathan suggested. “Harry is our guest of honor, and we’d be delighted if you’d attend as well.” Nathan then also included the other couple. “Thomas, you and Mione should come as well if you can.”

Thomas looked at Mione, knowing that she had to work on Monday morning. Aware that she had no planned meetings that morning, Mione decided that Remus could cope without her for a few hours. “We’d love to.”

Nathan beamed. "That's settled then. Seven thirty at the house in the Hamptons. Now if you'll excuse us, our car is waiting." While he could apparate, being a Muggleborn, Nathan preferred to be driven if he wasn't in a hurry.

Once they'd left, Thomas made a suggestion. "Are you two in a hurry to get back to the hotel?"

Harry shook his head. "Not at all. What do you suggest?"

"I promised Mione I'd take her dancing at Viscounts." Thomas mentioned a wizarding members only club that offered dancing and cocktails. "Would you like to join us?"

Cassandra looked hopefully at Harry, who agreed to Thomas' request. "We'd like that."

Thomas called the waiter over. "Can I have the check please?"

When it came, Harry offered to get it but Thomas shook his head. "We invited you but thank you for offering."

Thomas signed the credit card slip which, because of the champagne they'd been drinking, came to almost two thousand dollars. Thomas also added a very healthy tip before getting to his feet. "Mione can take Cassandra, if you don't mind. It will save us a walk out in the cold."

Harry put on his coat and headed for the men's bathroom, Thomas joining him a few moments' later. Harry had to stop himself from recoiling as Thomas took his arm and pain went through him. "I'm ready."

Thomas then apparated them both out of the restaurant. The two men then talked quietly as they waited for Mione and Cassandra to join them, both women obviously opting to use the bathroom facilities as it was evident that they'd reapplied make-up before joining the men.

Once inside the club itself, Thomas was shown to a table affording a good view of the dance floor before he put in an order with the drinks waiter for all four of them. Mione looked wistfully at the dance floor. Harry smiled at his ex-wife. "Would you like to dance, if Thomas doesn't mind?"

"I don't." Thomas squeezed Mione's hand. "I'll dance with you later."

Mione squeezed back before pulling free and joining Harry. Thomas dealt with the champagne that he'd had delivered. "I hope you don't mind that I ordered for you."

Cassandra shook her head as she took a sip of the champagne. "No. It's very kind of you to invite us like this."

"I'm enjoying the company." Thomas took a mouthful of his scotch. "So how are you enjoying USAD?"

"I haven't really seen much of it yet." Cassandra took another sip of the champagne, realizing she recognized it. "This is one of my favorites."

"Mine too." Thomas smiled at the girl's delight. "You were telling me about USAD."

With the champagne loosening her tongue, Cassandra told Thomas about her experience so far. "Everyone's been so nice, particularly Lucy."

"You mentioned her earlier, when you were talking about Harry's demonstrations." Thomas reminded Cassandra.

Cassandra nodded enthusiastically. "She said that both of them were pretty amazing." Cassandra glanced across Harry. "I wish I could have seen them."

"Perhaps Harry will share his memories with you." Thomas suggested. "You seem quite close."

“We are. He’s my best friend.” Cassandra didn’t realize that her true feelings for Harry were actually written all over her face.

Thomas filed this information away. “And Mione is most definitely mine.”

Cassandra gave a small sigh. “That’s so romantic.”

Thomas hid his smile. “Would you like to join Harry and Mione?”

Cassandra got up. “Thank you.”

As Thomas took her into his arms, Cassandra felt a little strange, but soon relaxed as Thomas chatted to her about the children. However it wasn’t long before Thomas steered the conversation back to Harry. “So are you going to ask Harry to share his memories?”

“I think so.” Cassandra badly wanted to see how Harry had fared.

“I have to admit I’m a little jealous that I can’t see them myself.” Thomas said in a quietly cautious voice.

Cassandra’s face suddenly lit up as an idea came to her. “Why don’t you ask Chief Bradford if you can view them? I’m sure she wouldn’t mind, particularly as you know her and her husband.”

“I don’t think that would be entirely appropriate.” Thomas remarked. “And I don’t think Harry would be very pleased if I went through someone else to see them.”

Cassandra explained that that wouldn’t be the case. “You wouldn’t have to. USAD keeps copies of memories like that for training purposes. Lucy told me. I can ask Chief Bradford at dinner tomorrow if you want me to.”

“That would be most kind, but I don’t want to be a bother.” Thomas glanced over at his wife. “Would you think me terribly rude if I asked if I could swap partners now?”

“Not at all.” Cassandra had seen the look Thomas had given Mione.

Harry had enjoyed dancing with Mione, but was more than happy to swap partners with Thomas. “So you two looked as if you were enjoying yourself.”

“He’s very interesting.” Cassandra laid her head on Harry’s shoulder before lifting it again as she realized that Harry was looking across the room.

Cassandra let her eyes follow Harry’s. “I thought you were over her, Harry.”

“I am.” Harry stopped staring at Thomas and Mione to turn his attention back to Cassandra. “I was just thinking that I’m glad that after everything she’s gone through, Mione’s obviously extremely happy in her marriage to Thomas.”

“Thomas told me that Mione’s his best friend.” Cassandra repeated what Thomas had said.

“I think he completes her in a way I never did.” Harry admitted, as he overheard Thomas telling Mione how much he loved her.

“You were both really young, Harry.” Cassandra pointed out. “And you’ve both obviously changed since then.”

“I know I have.” Harry remarked wryly. “And for the better I hope.”

“I’d say so from what you’ve told me.” Cassandra put her head back on Harry’s shoulder, and yawned. “I could go to sleep here.”

Harry knew that the time difference was catching up with Cassandra. “We’ll finish this dance, and I’ll make our apologies.”

“Thanks, Harry.” Cassandra yawned again. “Sorry.”

As the music ended, Harry led Cassandra over to Thomas and Mione. “I’m really sorry to cut this short so soon after arriving but the time

difference has finally caught up with Cass. If you don't mind, I'd like to take her back to the hotel."

"We understand." Thomas shook hands with Harry before kissing Cassandra on the cheek. "We had a very nice evening."

"Us too." After saying goodnight to Mione as well, Harry led Cassandra off to collect their coats and get back to the hotel.

The Next Night

Harry decided that he preferred Cassandra in a dress but had to admit that the black trouser suit and white camisole looked good on her. "I see you're wearing your jewelry again."

"It goes really well with this outfit." Cassandra didn't bother with a coat as they were apparating. "You'll have to apparate me as I have no idea where we're going."

"Come here then." Harry took the opportunity to wrap his arms around Cassandra's waist and draw her against him. "Are you ready?"

Cassandra found her mouth had gone dry at the feel of Harry holding her so close, and her answer came out as a squeak. "Yes."

Harry found out that they, together with Thomas and Mione, were the only guests. After dinner, the men headed into the basement for a game of billiards in the bar that Nathan had had put in, and the ladies went for a walk around the conservatory.

Cassandra eventually brought up the topic of Harry. "I was talking to Thomas last night, Ma'am." Cassandra still couldn't bring herself to call Chief Bradford, Michaela. "And I told him I'd like to see the memory recordings of Harry's demonstrations."

"And?" Michaela knew that there was more.

“Thomas also said that he wouldn’t mind seeing them.” Cassandra watched hope spring up on Mione’s face as well. “So I was wondering if there was any possibility of it.”

“Normally I don’t allow civilians to view such things but given Thomas’ connection to Nathan, I might be persuaded to bend the rules this time.” Michaela had known Thomas since he was a small boy, as Nathan had worked for his parents in one of their wizarding companies for almost thirty years before moving over to head the New York arm of the Foundation four years ago. “But only if Harry agrees to it.”

“Thank you, Ma’am.” Cassandra shared an excited look with Mione.

The three women then headed down to the basement to join the men where they discovered that Harry and Thomas were in the middle of a game, while Nathan sat watching. “Thomas, Cassandra just mentioned that you’ve shown an interest in viewing the demonstrations Harry gave last week.”

Thomas hesitated in the shot he was about to make. “I am interested but I didn’t want to take advantage of my connection to you by asking.”

Harry knew what was coming. “You need my permission, don’t you?”

Michaela nodded. “I know you’ve given permission for USAD employees to view them but Thomas, nor Mione for that matter, fall into that category.”

“Then you have my permission.” Harry couldn’t refuse it without seeming churlish.

Michaela addressed Thomas. “When would you like to view them?”

“Whenever it’s convenient to you.” Thomas was delighted he was going to get what he wanted.

“Now?” Michaela suggested. “I know it’s late but if Mione doesn’t mind, as I know she has to be up early to return to London, then I think it’s the best time.”

“I don’t mind.” Mione hadn’t seen Harry in action for a while, and like Cassandra, wanted to do so.

Michaela made some decisions. “Harry, if you’ll apparate Thomas through the wards, I’ll take Nathan, and Cassandra can take Mione.” Even though Nathan was married to the head of USAD, New York, he still didn’t have clearance to apparate directly into the facility there, as unlike BritAD, it was completely self-contained rather than being a part of the Ministry.

The group soon found themselves at USAD, and Michaela led the way down the corridor, Thomas walking with her and asking quiet questions as he went along. Eventually they reached a room with shelves lined with pensieves. Michaela found the relevant one she was looking for, and placed it on an empty table. “As you can see, we store a great deal of teaching material here.”

“I wish they had something like this back home.” Cassandra remarked. “But with the laws being what they are, we couldn’t do this.”

“We still have those laws, Cassandra.” Michaela informed her. “But they’ve been relaxed in relation to things like this. So if you’re all ready, let’s begin.”

Once inside the pensieve, Thomas watched in silence until Harry had finished decimating the French version of Unspeakables. “That was a very interesting spell you were using.”

Michaela spoke for Harry. “Harry’s been teaching the threefold spell to some of our senior Aurors who in turn will pass it down the line.”

“So you came up with the idea?” Thomas enquired.

Harry shook his head. “No.”

Michaela embellished on Harry's brief answer. "I believe it came from one of Harry's colleagues, Altus, who has also been here to teach before. Am I right?" Even though she referred to Altus by name, Michaela refrained from mentioning that Altus was an Unspeakable.

Harry ran with Michaela's incorrect notion. "You are, Ma'am."

Hearing this, Thomas wondered if this Altus had been the Unspeakable he'd seen use the spell at the Ministry when he'd been trying to take Sirius. "Either way, it's very impressive."

"As I said, I can't take the credit for it." Harry was dismissive of his involvement in the threefold spell.

"Shall we move on?" Without waiting for an answer, Michaela began the second memory.

Cassandra watched with interest as Harry told the crowd that he'd only be using the Stupefy and Accio spells against the Aurors' persons. "You're going to do more than that aren't you?"

Harry knew that unlike most of the people who'd watched the display, Cassandra had actually been listening. "You know me too well."

"No, I just know how sneaky you are." Cassandra shared a grin with Harry.

Thomas made a comment after Harry reappeared as the darkness he'd invoked disappeared, leaving the three Aurors down on the ground. "How did you manage that?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you." Harry apologized. "There are some things I prefer to remain confidential."

"I understand." Thomas decided he'd review his own memory when he returned to London so that he could look at the demonstration again, as he hadn't spotted any light at all inside the darkness.

When the memory came to the snakes, Thomas found that his contact had indeed been right about Harry's talent. "I see you share something with my wife."

"Not exactly." Harry didn't say much more as the memory progressed until the entire demonstration was over.

Thomas continued to watch as Harry explained to the audience about how little parseltongue he actually knew. "Where did you learn it?"

"From me." Mione knew that Harry wouldn't want anyone to know exactly how well versed he was in the language. "I'm surprised you actually retained what I told you, Harry."

"I did my best." Harry silently thanked his ex-wife for jumping in.

Having gotten what he came for, Thomas decided to take the onus off Harry. "Michaela, your daughter took quite a beating."

"I overpowered the spell." Harry interceded before Michaela could say anything. "And paid for it by having to take Emily and her friends out to dinner to apologize."

The group all laughed at the woebegone look on Harry's face, and they all left the pensieve. Michaela then returned the pensieve to its original spot. "So what did you think?"

Cassandra slipped her hand into Harry's. "I thought you were brilliant."

"You're my friend, and you're biased." Harry responded.

"I'm not biased, even though I'd like to think I can be counted as your friend." Thomas quipped. "And I have to agree with Cassandra. You were outstanding."

"Thank you." Harry resisted the temptation to squirm as everyone looked at him. "Now I think I've had enough attention for one night, so

if you'll excuse me, I'm going to leave while I'm ahead, and before everyone realizes that I'm not as good as they think I am."

The group headed back to the apparition point where everyone bid each other goodnight, Nathan and Michaela leaving first after telling Thomas that the wards would allow him to leave; just not to apparate in. Thomas turned to Harry and held out his hand. "I meant what I said, you really were outstanding."

"It's just down to practice." Harry shook hands before moving to hug Mione, and whispering in her ear. "Thank you."

Mione squeezed Harry briefly to acknowledge his thanks before letting go of him. "I'll see you at Luna's wedding as I doubt I'll manage to see you before then."

"Probably not." Harry let go of her.

As Harry was hugging Mione, Thomas also did the same to Cassandra. "Thank you for asking Michaela. I really did appreciate it."

Cassandra hugged him back, before being released. "I wanted to see it as well, so I did have an ulterior motive."

"Don't we all?" Thomas kissed her cheek as well. "And I'll definitely see you both at Luna's wedding."

"Goodnight then." Harry wrapped his arms around Cassandra's waist and, after waiting for Thomas and Mione to disappear, he apparated them both out of USAD.

On arriving back at his room, Harry let go of Cassandra. "I'll let you go to bed."

Cassandra hesitated. "Are you mad at me?"

"No." Harry wasn't happy that he'd been put on display but he wasn't angry with Cassandra.

“You are mad at me.” Cassandra put a hand on Harry’s arm. “I’m sorry. I just really wanted to see the demonstrations.”

“I’m not mad, Cass.” Harry reiterated. “But in future if you want to see something, just ask. You know I’ll show it to you.”

“Thomas wanted to see the demonstrations as well.” Cassandra reminded Harry. “You wouldn’t have wanted to show him your memories of it, would you?”

“No.” Harry knew that he’d have given Destin away if he had. “But that’s only because some of the things I did would have raised too many questions, which is why you’ve just viewed Michaela’s memory and not mine as I refused to allow my own to go on record.”

Cassandra suddenly found that she regretted making the request of Michaela. “I should have just kept my mouth shut.” Cassandra dropped her head against Harry’s shoulder, her shoes making her tall enough to do so.

“It doesn’t matter now.” Harry rubbed Cassandra’s arm.

“Are you sure?” Cassandra dropped her hands to Harry’s waist, and leant back so that she could look at him.

“Perfectly.” Harry could see that Cassandra really was upset thinking she’d annoyed him. “Cass, you didn’t do anything wrong.”

Cassandra sighed heavily, and looked down. “Then why I do I feel like I did?”

Harry raised a hand and lifted Cassandra’s chin up so that she’d look at him. “You really didn’t, so stop worrying okay?”

Cassandra met Harry’s gaze. “Okay.”

Wanting to show her that he really wasn’t angry, Harry leant forward to kiss Cassandra’s nose. At the same time Cassandra moved to kiss Harry’s cheek meaning that Harry found his lips covering

Cassandra's and went to pull away. Cassandra, however, didn't and moved her hand so that it rested at the back of Harry's neck, as she increased the pressure.

Harry closed his eyes, and responded to the kiss, before coming to his senses, and firmly setting Cassandra away from him. "Cass, we can't do this."

Cassandra felt disappointment lance through her. "Why not?"

Harry stepped away, wanting to maintain some distance. "I'm supposed to be your Mentor, and we both know that this sort of thing is against the rules."

"For goodness sake, Harry, it was just a kiss." Cassandra's voice was terse, as she once again felt frustrated by Harry's refusal to take things further.

"And from our time at Thomas', we both know where that can lead." Harry reminded her of what might happen if it had gone further. "I'm sorry, Cass. But I can't be anything but your friend."

Cassandra felt like crying. "I'd better go to bed before I screw up even worse than I've already done tonight."

"You didn't screw up, Cass." Harry said gently. "It was just a mistake."

"Something I seem to be making a lot of lately." Cassandra remarked.

Harry knew that she was talking about her request of Michaela, rather than their abortive kiss. "Cass, I've already said I'm not mad about the memories, and that you didn't do anything wrong."

"That's why Mione had to jump in and lie for you about the parseltongue." Cassandra pointed out. "And don't say that it doesn't matter."

“It doesn’t.” Harry had been grateful to Mione but it hadn’t been the end of the world. “Yes, I’m glad that Mione stepped in, but if she hadn’t, I’d have lied about it myself.”

“We’re just going round in circles. I think I’ve messed up, and you don’t.” Cassandra picked up her handbag. “So I’m going to bed.”

“Goodnight then.” Harry didn’t attempt to kiss Cassandra as he normally would.

Cassandra too made no attempt to touch Harry. “Goodnight, Harry.”

As Cassandra closed the door, Harry sat down on his bed, and ran his hand through his hair. He knew that he’d come close to ignoring his inner voice, and simply giving into what he really wanted. Harry was also cognizant of the fact that he really should put some distance between him and Cassandra but he found himself not wanting to. Swearing, he got up and began to get changed for bed.

Ten floors above Harry, the subject of parseltongue was also being discussed as, after getting into bed and pulling a naked Mione to lie on top of him, Thomas mentioned it to Mione. “You’ve never offered to teach me to speak to snakes.”

Mione lifted her head. “I didn’t realize you’d be interested.”

“How about teaching me something now?” Thomas asked.

Thinking that Thomas’ nose had been put out of joint, Mione did so. She hissed at him. “I love you.”

“Are you going to translate?” Thomas asked, even as he knew what Mione had said.

“I said I love you.” Mione kissed his chest. “It’s something I’ve never taught to Harry.”

“I’m glad.” Thomas rolled her over so that she was now under him, and hissed the same back at her.

Mione's mouth fell open. "You're a fast learner."

"You're a good teacher." Thomas countered.

Mione bit her lip. "Thomas, are you upset that I've never offered before?"

"No." Thomas had never thought to ask as he already knew the language. "I was just surprised to find that you'd taught it to Harry."

"It's useful in his job but it's something he likes to keep to himself as it gives him an advantage." As she spoke, Mione let her hands trail down Thomas' back.

"You're certainly right there." Thomas moved his own hand to cup his wife's breast. "But suddenly I find I don't want to talk about Harry."

"Neither do I." Mione lifted her head and captured Thomas' lips with her own, all thoughts of Harry and parseltongue fleeing as Thomas returned the kiss.

6th December 2004

Thomas turned to Regulus. "So what do you think?"

Regulus had just finished watching Thomas' memory of Thomas watching Harry's demonstration. "You're right. He's exceptional. But he's already turned you down once."

"I'm going to try again. I need people like that, to say nothing of the advantage of having someone that high up in the Auror Division on my side." Thomas pulled out of the pensieve. "But if he refuses, then I'm hoping to use Cassandra to help persuade him to change his mind."

"How?" Regulus couldn't see how Cassandra would be in a position to do so.

“By using his feelings for her.” Thomas had noted carefully how Harry had treated Cassandra during the two evenings they’d gone out together.

“So you’re telling me that Harry is in love with Cassandra?” Regulus sat down.

Thomas shook his head. “I’m not sure if it’s love, but he was definitely protective of her, to say nothing of the money I know he must have spent on her jewelry and outfit. Mione said, however, that they’re just good friends.”

Regulus mulled over what Thomas had just said. “Perhaps Cassandra doesn’t feel the same way.”

Thomas sat down opposite Regulus. “That’s definitely not the case.”

“What makes you say that?” Regulus wondered whether Cassandra had confided in Thomas.

Thomas thought back to the love-struck look Cassandra had given Harry. “She was all but drooling over him when we were at Viscounts.”

Regulus returned to the comment about Harry and the outfit. “So how much do you think he spent on her?”

“I’m guessing in the region of about ten or so thousand dollars.” Thomas had seen the prices of the jewelry Harry had bought, when Thomas had bought Mione jewelry from the same store to go with her lilac dress. To Thomas it had been an insignificant amount but he wasn’t quite so sure about Harry’s wealth.

Regulus whistled. “That’s a lot of money to spend on someone who’s just a friend.”

“Either way, I have a feeling that Harry will see things my way if Cassandra’s life depends on it.” Thomas informed Regulus.

“Are you going to try and lure him in when I take Cassandra?” Regulus still felt uneasy about what he was doing.

Thomas nodded. “If he refuses me I will. As I’m sure Harry is aware of where the Clavis is, I’ll be killing two birds with one stone.”

“Will you still let Cassandra go afterwards if you have to take that route?” Regulus found himself hoping that Harry would initially refuse leaving Sirius in the clear but he was still concerned for his niece.

“As long as Harry does as I tell him, then yes.” Thomas had no intention of harming Cassandra unless he had to. “I think we should rejoin our wives now.”

Regulus followed Thomas out of the study, and back to where they’d left the two women talking.

7th December 2004

Harry opened up the letter that he’d picked up from reception. “I don’t believe it.”

Cassandra glanced up from the book she was reading on his bed. “What’s wrong?”

“Read this.” Harry passed the letter over.

Cassandra scanned the letter.

Auror Sebastian,

I would like to meet tonight at eight o’clock. You have my word that nothing will happen to you. I have something I need to discuss.

Dominus

Cassandra frowned. “That’s it?”

“Yes.” Harry took the letter back. “There’s no mention of how, where or why.”

“I’m scared.” Cassandra could feel her heart beating faster.

“He obviously knows where I’m staying as this was waiting for me downstairs.” Harry checked the time. “It’s seven-forty. I don’t know why but I’ve got the feeling he’s coming here.”

Cassandra paled. “Shouldn’t we alert USAD?”

Harry thought about it but then shook his head. “Could you imagine a full scale fight here? And I don’t want to be responsible for how many Aurors he’d take out before it was over. So no alert. I do, however, want you out of here, and safely inside USAD. Go to my office, and I’ll meet you there, and whatever you do, don’t mention this to anyone.”

“I’m not leaving you alone.” Cassandra was terrified of Dominus but she found was more terrified of leaving Harry with him.

“I’m not asking you, Auror Black, I’m ordering you to leave.” Harry reverted to formality as pulled rank on Cassandra.

Cassandra wanted to refuse but knew she’d be facing disciplinary action if she did. “Yes, Sir.”

Harry relaxed. “Cass, I can’t risk you. Now go.”

Cassandra grabbed her shoes and vanished. Harry let out a long sigh. He just hoped that he’d done the right in ignoring Cassandra’s suggestion.

At exactly eight o’clock a rap at Harry’s door told him that someone was outside. Unholstering his wands he flicked one at the door. “Alohamora.”

The door swung open to reveal a gold-masked man. “Auror Sebastian, may I come in?”

“The door’s open.” Harry kept his wands in front of him.

Dominus stepped into the room. “I have no intention of picking a fight so you can lower your wands.”

“I’d prefer to keep them like this.” Harry backed away as Dominus closed the door behind him.

“As you wish.” Dominus sat down at the table. “I’ll get straight to the point. I’ve been made aware of your particular talents, and I’d like to add them to my organization.”

Harry was flabbergasted. He’d been expecting Dominus to want to talk about the Clavis. “You can’t seriously think I’d consider joining you.”

“Auror Sebastian, do you have any idea of what I’m offering?” Dominus hadn’t expected Harry to accept.

“A life of subservience?” Harry shook his head. “I’m not interested.”

“There’s going to come a time when the order of things in this world will change.” Dominus informed Harry. “Anyone who stands at my side will benefit when it does.”

Harry still refused. “I’d rather take my chances.”

Dominus stood up. “Is that your final answer?”

“Yes.” Harry now became even more alert as he knew that the conversation was coming to an end.

“I just hope you don’t live to regret that decision.” Dominus put his hand on the door handle. “Goodnight.”

Harry didn’t move as Dominus opened the door and let himself out. Harry then heard the tiny pop of apparition, and he shakily lowered his wands, before raising them again to invoke packing spells. Leaving his clothing flying into his suitcase, he went into Cassandra’s

room and did the same. He then shrank both suitcases and went downstairs to check both him and Cassandra out. He then headed outside.

Cassandra jumped up the minute Harry walked into the room and ran across it into his arms. "Harry, thank goodness."

Harry held Cassandra tightly against him, feeling her body shaking. "I'm fine, Cass. He just wanted to talk. Let's get out of here."

After being released, Cassandra found herself being led back to the apparition point in USAD before Harry apparated her out. When they landed she looked around. "You rented a suite?"

"I did." Harry had decided he wanted Cassandra where he could see her. "Your bedroom is through there, and mine is around that corner. I want to take the precaution of putting the entire suite under the Fidelius for the rest of our stay."

"Don't you think that's a little drastic?" Cassandra asked.

"No." Harry went over to the bar area and took out a bottle of wine from the stocked refrigerator that he'd requested. "I've just refused to join Dominus so I think it's best we take every precaution possible."

Cassandra blanched. "What exactly happened?"

Harry told her as he sorted out their drinks. "I think I've pissed him off somewhat."

Cassandra got up and wrapped her arms around Harry. "I hate this."

"So do I but it goes with the territory." Even though he was dismissive, Harry was more concerned that he was letting Cassandra know.

"Aren't you frightened?" Cassandra looked up at Harry.

"Yes." Harry admitted. "I'd be a fool not to be."

“I can’t stand the thought of anything happening to you.” Cassandra shivered.

Harry could sense Cassandra’s fear. “Don’t worry about me.”

“But I do.” Cassandra touched Harry’s cheek.

Harry felt his heart jump at her touch, and he stepped away. “I think we should forget about it for tonight, otherwise you’ll get no sleep. I’ve put in an order for some food which I’ll go collect now, and then come back here. We can then invoke the Fidelius.”

“Okay.” Cassandra watched Harry disappear.

The next day in London, Regulus opened up a brief note that was short and to the point. “Harry is the target.”

Thank you to SuperBatGirl for her comments which inspired the Viscounts scene, which in turn lead to the creation of this entire chapter, that wasn't supposed to exist.

Next Chapter: Cassandra bites off more than she can chew; Harry loses his temper; Harry’s initial warning to the USAD girls comes back to haunt them.

Chapter 36: Consequences

9th December 2004

As the class Harry was teaching ended, he was approached by Tabitha. "Auror Jenkins, what can I help you with?"

Spotting Tabitha with Harry, Cassandra hesitated before following the rest of the class out.

Tabitha decided to get straight to the point. "Are you dating Cassandra?"

Harry's face became closed. "No, not that's it any of your business, Auror."

"I'm not trying to upset you." Tabitha could see that she'd pissed Harry off. "It's just that I'd like to take you out to dinner tomorrow night, but if you're seeing Cassandra, then I don't want to muddy the waters."

Harry decided that this was his chance to put the distance he needed between him and Cassandra. "No, I'm not seeing Cassandra, and yes, I'd like to go out to dinner."

Tabitha's face lit up. "I'll meet you at your hotel at seven thirty then."

"I've got a better idea. Bring whatever you need to get changed into, and you can come back to the hotel with me to get showered and changed." Harry suggested, knowing that with the Fidelius in operation, the hotel would have no idea of where to tell Tabitha which room he was in or that he was even a guest.

Tabitha decided that that would do fine. "I can do that."

"I'll see you in class tomorrow." As Tabitha left, Harry continued to pack up his things before leaving, and heading for the apparition point. When he arrived back at the suite, he wasn't surprised to find Cassandra waiting for him. "I thought you'd be in the shower by now."

“I just wanted to see if everything was alright.” Cassandra said in an offhand voice.

Harry knew exactly what Cassandra wanted to know. “Everything’s fine but I thought I should let you know that I won’t be around for dinner tomorrow night as I’m going out with Tabitha. She’s coming back here to shower and change first.”

Cassandra couldn’t hide her hurt, and she hurriedly got to her feet. “I’ll see you tomorrow for breakfast then. I’m actually going to get an early night as I’m not really hungry.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Cass.” Harry watched as Cassandra closed her bedroom door. He knew she was upset about him seeing Tabitha but he decided that it would be better for both of them if he started dating again. Ignoring the guilt he was feeling, Harry disappeared to get something to eat.

The Next Day

After class, Harry apparated Tabitha back to the hotel suite. “As you can see, I prefer to stay in Muggle hotels.”

“I don’t blame you.” Tabitha preferred them as well. “They’re usually better situated.”

“Can I get you something from the bar?” Harry asked politely.

“Gin and tonic please.” Tabitha leant against the wall as Harry poured it out. “So do you usually invite students back to your hotel?”

“No.” Harry pulled out a beer and ripped the tab back, before taking a mouthful. “As you well know, it’s against the rules to fraternize with the students, but as I’m only a guest teacher at USAD, and you’re not exactly a student, I think I can allow it this once.” Harry smiled suggestively at her.

Tabitha put down her glass. "And it's not as if I'm going to tell anyone."

Harry also put down his beer, and stood with his hands pressed against the wall on either side of Tabitha. "And besides there's nothing to tell."

Tabitha reached up to wrap her arms around Harry's neck. "Not yet, anyway."

Harry lowered his head to kiss Tabitha.

In her room, Cassandra had finished showering, and, intending to watch some television, she padded back into the bedroom to switch it on. Just as she reached for the remote control, she heard a noise come from the room next door. Hesitating, she became totally still, until she heard a low moan followed by a deeper groan.

Scowling, she ripped off her towel and began to pull on some clothes.

The Minstrel

Duncan's face lit up as Cassandra walked into the bar where he was sitting with a group of the trainees. "I think my ship just came in."

Emily swung round, and spotted what Duncan was talking about. "I think you're playing with fire, Duncan, but if you still want to go for it, then on your head be it."

Lucy backed her friend up. "Emily's right, Duncan. I have the feeling Auror Sebastian will have your neck if you go too far with her."

"Just because he works with her doesn't mean he's responsible for her, so mind your own business." Duncan got up and headed for Cassandra. "I'm surprised to see you here."

"I didn't feel like staying in my hotel room." Cassandra let him escort her to where the others were sitting. "I hope you all don't mind if I join you." Everyone assured her that she was more than welcome.

“No Boss Man?” Duncan asked as he summoned a house elf to get a drink for Cassandra.

“He’s spending the evening with Tabitha.” Cassandra responded shortly, before giving her order to the house elf that was now hovering at the side of the table. As she did so, she missed the smug look that Duncan gave to his sister, Louise and Emily.

As the evening progressed, Cassandra found that she was really enjoying herself. Duncan bided his time, plying Cassandra with quite a lot of what seemed to be fairly innocuous drinks. Eventually, however, Duncan decided it was time to make his move. “Would you like to dance?”

“Okay.” Cassandra by now had had enough to drink to dismiss how uncomfortable she’d felt with Duncan previously.

After Duncan led a swaying Cassandra onto the dance floor, he made a suggestion. “It’s getting a little warm in here. How do you fancy coming back to my place? We can have a glass of wine and I’ll use a warming charm so that we can sit out on the balcony.”

Cassandra shook her head. “I can’t.”

Hiding his annoyance, Duncan took Cassandra into his arms as the next record began. “How about just coming back for a coffee then?”

Again Cassandra refused. “I really can’t.” Cassandra then went to turn away, only for Duncan to grab her by the hand and pull her back towards him; her inebriated state making it easy to do so. He then used to his free hand to cup Cassandra’s face as he kissed her. Cassandra started to protest, only to go limp as she acquiesced and began to return the kiss.

As the kiss ended, Duncan left his hand against Cassandra’s face. “So do you think that you might have changed your mind about that coffee?”

Cassandra wanted to say no but found herself agreeing instead. "Okay but just for one."

"Good." With that, Duncan began kissing her again, drawing her tightly against his body.

Several hours earlier

Just after Cassandra had heard a moan, in the dining room, Harry pulled free from the kiss he and Tabitha were sharing, and gave a deep groan. "I'm sorry Tabitha but I can't do this."

Tabitha sighed heavily. "It's Cassandra isn't it?"

Harry nodded. "I'm really sorry. I thought; well I don't know what I thought."

"Do you want to talk about it?" Tabitha picked her gin and tonic back up.

"I'm surprised you haven't slapped me around the face rather than offering to talk." Harry was glad she hadn't as he knew she'd have hurt her hand if she did.

"I've been there, so no slapping." Tabitha admitted. "So are you in love or lust?"

"Most definitely lust." Harry picked up his beer. "With a huge sprinkling of obsession I think. Let's go and sit in my room." Harry didn't want Cassandra coming out while he was talking about her.

Once inside Harry's bedroom, Tabitha sat down on the sofa in there, and patted the space beside her. "Come sit by me and we'll talk. I give you my word that anything you tell me will stay between us."

Harry was aware that he needed to talk to someone as the situation was driving him mad. "I'll pop out and get us some take-out, grab some wine and then we'll talk."

After Harry had collected what they wanted, and they'd eaten, Harry found himself opening up to the tiny blonde girl. He told her about how things had started between him and Cassandra, up until the previous weekend. "We've been dancing around each other for months, and it doesn't help that I spend so much time with her. So I thought if I could just put some distance between us, I'd be able to put her out of mind."

"Good luck with that." Tabitha knew that that sort of thing just didn't work. "I'm still saying that about my last boyfriend who dumped me to go out with the perfect marriage material his parents had chosen for him."

"Ouch." Harry squeezed Tabitha's hand. "My turn if you want to spill."

Tabitha did, ending up blowing her nose on a handkerchief at the end of it. "That's probably the most honest I've been with anyone, including myself."

"You're not alone." Harry turned as a buzzing sound came from Tabitha's jacket that was lying on the bed. She made no attempt, however, to get up and get it. "Aren't you going to answer that?"

Tabitha really didn't want to talk to anyone else at that moment. "No, if it's important, they'll leave a message. I'm off duty."

Harry got up and picked up the jacket, before passing it over to Tabitha. "I'm sorry Tabitha, but an Auror's never off duty."

Tabitha reluctantly extracted the cell phone. "Auror Jenkins."

"Tab, thank goodness." At the other end of the line, Lucy Viking breathed a sigh of relief. "I was worried you'd be out of reception. Is Auror Sebastian with you?"

Tabitha glanced at Harry. "Yes. Why?"

“Duncan’s up to his usual tricks with Cassandra Black. I’m frightened of what he’ll do if I try and stop him, but I know it’s different for Auror Sebastian.” Lucy hurriedly spoke to her friend. “Can you ask him to come to the Minstrel before things go too far?”

“Yes, and thanks for letting me know.” Tabitha rang off. “I take it you heard that.”

Harry had. “It looks as though our evening is going to be cut short.”

“Lucy’s told me before that Duncan can be a nasty piece of work, which is why she’s afraid to approach him directly.” Tabitha remarked, before hesitating and revealing something else important to Harry. “You should know Duncan has a bet that he can get Cassandra into bed.”

Harry felt anger rise up inside of him. “Who is the bet with, Tabitha?”

“Louise.” Tabitha responded reluctantly.

Harry scowled as he pulled his shoes on. “If anything happens to Cass while she’s here, her father will string me up for not keeping an eye on her.”

Tabitha tugged her jacket on. “Do you want me to go with you?”

“If you want to.” Harry checked his wands. “Either way I’m going.”

“So am I.” Tabitha shoved her cell phone back in her pocket, and checked her own wands.

“Do all Aurors carry a mobile phone?” Harry apparated out as he asked the question, knowing that Tabitha would answer when she arrived.

Tabitha appeared beside Harry, and then they both began to hurry up the street to where the bar was. “Yes, because it’s an easy way of getting in contact with someone if they’re in a Muggle area. I’m surprised that BritAD doesn’t have them.”

“It’s certainly something I might consider, especially considering the conditions they work in.” Harry didn’t mention that he hadn’t known that the Muggle technology could be employed in a Muggle area, even through the Fidelius. Filing the thought away to be dealt with at a later point, he soon reached the bar, and pushed open the door, his eyes scanning the room until he found Cassandra, who was wrapped around Duncan in the middle the dance floor. His scowl deepening, he headed their way. “Do you two mind if I interrupt?”

Cassandra and Duncan immediately separated. “Harry, what are you doing here?”

“Fetching you.” Harry stood with his arms folded, as the other dancers on the floor, mostly staff from USAD, stopped what they were doing as they wanted to see what would happen.

“I’m fine on my own.” Cassandra placed a hand on Duncan’s arm as she swayed precariously. “I’m going to Duncan’s for coffee.”

“ I don’t think so.” From her slurred words, Harry knew that Cassandra had definitely had too much to drink. “You’re in no fit state to apparate.”

Duncan stepped in. “I think Cassandra can decide what she wants to do for herself, Sir.”

Harry heard the sarcasm laced in the word ‘Sir’. “I disagree. Cassandra might not have told you but while she’s here, I’m her guardian.”

Duncan glanced at Cassandra. “Is he really your guardian?”

Cassandra nodded. “Yes. Dad made him resh... resh... you know what I mean.”

Harry knew exactly what Cassandra meant, even if she couldn’t get the word out she was looking for. “And as I am responsible for her,

I'm taking her home with me. She'll see you in class in the morning, Starr."

Duncan took Cassandra's hand. "Guardian or not, she's still twenty-one."

Cassandra leaned heavily against Duncan. "And I'm going with him."

"You'll do as you're told, and come with me." Harry wrapped his fingers around Cassandra's wrist, gently tugging her away from Duncan. Harry then faced the onlookers. "That's it for the entertainment. For any of the trainees here, if anyone's late into class tomorrow, then I'll be awarding demerits. Enjoy the rest of your evening."

Meanwhile Lucy had slipped back into the bar via the back entrance just before Harry and Tabitha had arrived, and so was standing at the edge of the dance floor when Duncan looked round. He marched angrily over to her. "I can't believe he showed up."

"I'm glad he did. You can't win the bet now." Lucy's voice shook as she finally stood up to Duncan. "So I want you to leave Cassandra alone."

"That's not going to happen. And as I'm quite sure that that interfering bastard is interested in being more than Cassandra's guardian, I'm going to win that bet, even if it kills me. And don't even think about butting in." Duncan warned Lucy as he tweaked her cheek sharply. "Goodnight, sis."

Outside the bar, Harry pulled a protesting Cassandra towards the apparition point, Tabitha following behind them. "Tabitha, I'll see you tomorrow."

"Goodnight, Harry." Tabitha leaned over and kissed Harry on the cheek. "I'll meet up with you before class if that's alright."

Harry guessed that Tabitha wanted to talk about the bet. "It is. Come to my office at seven."

Tabitha knew that she was likely going to be in a lot of trouble as making, as well as being privvy to, any bet was illegal. And one of this nature was likely to result in a humdinger of a dressing down. She turned to Cassandra. "I hope you feel okay tomorrow. Goodnight."

Cassandra ignored the girl, and brusquely asked Harry a question. "Are we going or can I go back to Duncan?"

Harry impatiently wrapped his arms around her waist. "Keep still."

On arriving back at his hotel room, Harry blew up at Cassandra the moment he released her. "Just what the hell do you think you were you playing at with him?"

"Having fun." Cassandra held onto the table as she swayed again. "You were."

"Exactly what do you mean by that?" Harry withdrew his wand.

"I heard you two." Cassandra snapped, her words still slurred. "I don't see why you should be able sleep with someone, and not me."

"Cass, less than two weeks ago you said you'd rather date Malfoy than Starr." After taking precautions, Harry replaced his wand.

"I was only dancing." Cassandra tried to defend herself.

Harry totally disagreed. "You were acting like a tramp."

Cassandra reached over, and slapped Harry as hard as she could. "You can't talk. You were obviously fucking Tabitha or about to."

Harry pushed down his anger. "At least I wasn't doing it in public."

"Just because you don't want me, doesn't mean someone else doesn't." Cassandra's almost indistinct words tumbled out as she vented her frustration at Harry. "So why don't you just go back to fucking Tabitha, and mind your own fucking business."

Harry had had enough, and decided to treat her as he would his children if they'd behaved in the same way. "I don't have to listen to this. Go to your room. We'll talk again when you've sobered up and calmed down."

"I'm going back." Cassandra attempted to apparate.

Harry knew then that Cassandra was even drunker than he'd originally suspected if she hadn't noticed him warding the room. "You're going to your room."

"You're not my Dad. You can't stop me." Cassandra stomped over to the door, cannoning off a table as she tried to get out.

Harry grabbed her wrist before she could reach it. "I think I can."

Cassandra turned on him. "Just fucking let go of me."

Harry ignored the bad language. "No."

Cassandra clumsily withdrew her wand, and turned it on Harry. "I said fucking well let go of me now."

Harry swiftly disarmed her. "Don't you dare ever pull a wand like that again on anyone."

"Drop dead." Cassandra snarled.

It was the final straw for Harry. "If you want to act like a child, then I'm going to treat you like one." Harry then tugged Cassandra over to the bed, before pulling her over his lap, and proceeding to spank her.

As the blows rained down on her backside, Cassandra started to cry. After six, Harry released her and set her back on her feet. "And don't expect me to apologize for that, because it isn't going to happen."

Cassandra rubbed her smarting backside through her skirt. "I'm telling Dad what you did."

“Be my guest.” Harry wasn’t put off by Cassandra’s threat. “As I’m sure he’d love to see the memory of you and Starr as well. And when he does, I’m quite sure he’ll be adding a spanking of his own.”

Even though Sirius had never raised a finger to her in his life, Cassandra had a feeling that there might be a first time if he ever saw what she’d done. “I hate you. I really, really hate you.”

It was at times like this that Harry was aware of the age gap between them. “I’m sure you do but right now I don’t care. Now get out of my sight, and get into bed.”

“No.” Cassandra still didn’t want to do as Harry said.

Harry wondered if he’d been this awful to deal with when he’d been drunk during his youth. “Cassandra Black, I suggest you do as I say before I find a reason to spank you again.”

“No.” Cassandra refused again.

At her refusal, Harry pulled out his wand and dropped the wards. “Fine. In that case, you’re free to leave. If you want to go back to that piece of scum and let him sleep with you, then do so. But believe me, if you do that, then our friendship is over, and I’ll ask your father to transfer you or, if necessary, me, so that I don’t have to have anything more to do with you.”

At Harry’s words, Cassandra slid to the ground and began to sob heavily. Glad that he’d finally appeared to have gotten through to her, Harry let out a long sigh, and reached down to scoop her up into his arms. He then placed her on his lap, rocking her as she clung to him.

Cassandra buried her face in Harry’s neck as she sobbed. Eventually, however, she lifted her head to look at Harry before looking down again. “I really sorry, Harry. Please don’t hate me.”

Harry had, by now, calmed down. “I don’t hate you, Cass. But you have no idea how frightened I was for you when I overheard Lucy’s

conversation with Tabitha. I just couldn't stand by, and let him take advantage of you, especially when Tabitha admitted it was all because of a bet."

Cassandra lifted her tearstained and blotchy face once more. "He had a bet?"

"Yes, with Louise Page." Harry revealed. "She had a bet with him that he wouldn't be able to get you to sleep with him. But judging from what I saw tonight, if things had gone much further, I think he'd have won it."

Shame flooded Cassandra as she knew Harry was right. "I'm sorry."

Harry decided to try and find out what had happened. "Why did you go out, Cass? When you left USAD you said you were going to sit in your room and watch TV."

"I could hear you." Cassandra dropped her head yet again, and leant against Harry's chest, her words came out between sobs. "I could hear you."

Harry lifted Cassandra up and put her on the sofa. "Let me get you a calming potion and something to sober you up." Harry went into his room to rummage through his things until he found his box where he usually kept at least one of every potion he thought he might need.

When Harry returned, Cassandra took both potions, and shuddered as her blurred world slammed into sharp focus, as did the pain in her hand. "My hand hurts."

Harry scanned it. "You've broken several bones in it from slapping me. Let me heal them."

"Ow. Ow." Cassandra cried out in pain as Harry did what was necessary to repair her hand, before going back to his things and finding a painkilling potion. "Take this as well."

After watching Cassandra drink the potion, Harry sat back down beside her and put his arm around her. "I still want to know what happened at the bar."

Cassandra felt better with Harry holding her. "This morning Lucy said she was going with the other girls to the Minstrel tonight, and asked if I wanted to go. I said no but when I heard you and Tabitha, I changed my mind. I certainly didn't know Duncan would be there. I wanted to forget about you, so I kept on drinking everything that was put in front of me. When Duncan asked me to dance, I decided that it couldn't do any harm."

As Cassandra fell silent, Harry urged her to continue. "And?"

"He asked me to go back to his place, and I said no. But then he kissed me and I found I'd changed my mind." Cassandra's face began to burn with embarrassment as she remembered how she'd acted on the dance floor.

Harry frowned. "Can I check something?"

"Yes." Cassandra felt, rather than saw, Harry unholster his wand.

Harry checked for any traces of the Imperius and found nothing. "You weren't being influenced magically, so I'm going to put it down to too much alcohol. It's late, Cass, so for the moment I suggest you get a shower as you stink of cigarettes and alcohol. I'll sort you out a hangover potion, and leave it by your bed. We're going to have to talk about your behavior tomorrow."

"Okay." Cassandra, like Tabitha, had a feeling that she was going to be in trouble. Sliding miserably off the sofa, she made her way into her room before doing as Harry had suggested.

The Next Morning

Harry had just finished talking to Tabitha about the bet, when a knock sounded on his door. "Come in."

Lucy blushed when she saw Tabitha, as she thought that she'd interrupted something of a romantic nature. "Can I speak to you before class, Sir?"

"Wait outside please. I won't be more than a few minutes." Harry instructed.

"Yes, Sir." Lucy closed the door.

Harry turned back to Tabitha, his conversation with her almost over. "I'll be talking to Chief Bradford about this, Auror Jenkins, and she'll decide on how to deal with you. Dismissed."

"Yes, Sir." Tabitha hurried out of the room, nerves churning her stomach as she knew that Michaela Bradford wasn't likely to go easy on her.

After making a few notes, Harry got up and asked Lucy to come in, leaving her to follow him in as he headed back to sit behind his desk. "Close the door, and then sit down."

Lucy was nervous as she did so, and looked down at her hands, before glancing back up to meet Harry's eyes. "Is Cassandra alright, Sir?"

"A little hung over, but there's no permanent damage except to her dignity." Harry could feel Lucy's nerves. "What is it you want to talk to me about?"

"It's about my brother, Duncan." Lucy swallowed hard as Harry's face was closed off, and she had no idea of what he was thinking. "He's an empath, Sir."

"And why is that important?" Harry didn't give Lucy any measure of comfort as he questioned her.

"He's not the normal kind of empath." Lucy's gaze dropped back down to her hands. "If he touches someone, he can influence both their emotions, and their actions."

Harry wasn't best pleased by the news. "Did you call Auror Jenkins last night because he was doing this to Auror Black?"

Lucy nodded. "I think he was. I'm not sure but I really didn't think that Cassandra would have behaved that way otherwise. Duncan had a bet with someone that he could get Cassandra to sleep with him. Both Emily and I warned him about trying something with Cassandra but he wouldn't listen to us. Afterwards I tried again and he threatened me." Lucy started to cry. "I'm sorry, Sir. I should have told you sooner."

Harry handed over the box of tissues that were on his desk. "Wipe your eyes. Does Chief Bradford know of Starr's ability?"

Lucy wiped her eyes as she answered Harry. "Yes, Sir. Duncan's mother is Tamsin Bradstock."

Harry had heard about Auror Bradstock's unusual ability to extract information when everything else had failed. Now he knew why. "You have different mothers?"

Lucy explained the set-up of her family. "My birth parents both died in an accident when I was a baby. Tamsin Starr was my godmother and, even though she already had Duncan and her husband died in the same accident that killed my parents, she adopted me after their deaths as I had no other relatives. Tamsin eventually married Colin Bradstock."

"Are you happy in your family life?" Harry asked gently, his stern demeanor fading.

"Very much." Lucy's face lit up. "I consider Colin and Tamsin to be my parents. I only have a different surname because Mum said my birth parents had been a good people, and they'd have wanted me to retain my last name. I'm actually Lucy Bradstock-Viking but just usually use Viking here."

Harry could see from Lucy's face that she adored her parents. "Do you have any other siblings?"

Lucy nodded. "I have a younger sister, Janet, who I get on well with. I also have a baby brother, Michael. Mum only gave birth to him a month ago, which is why she's on maternity leave at the moment."

"And how about Duncan? Do you get on well with him?" Harry enquired as he tried to establish exactly how Lucy felt about her brother.

"Not really." Lucy didn't realize that she'd begun to shred the tissue as she talked about Duncan. "I sometimes think he only enrolled to become an Auror because I did. Even though we're both third years, he's three years older than I am."

"It just sounds like a simple case of sibling rivalry." Harry remarked, hoping that Lucy would continue to talk about Duncan.

She did. "It's more than that. When we were little, I was forever ending up in trouble for doing things I had no intention of doing. It was only as I got older that I began to understand what Duncan could do when I overheard Mum and Dad talking about Duncan's ability. When I threatened to tell our parents what I thought he'd done to me, he hit me."

Harry scowled. "Is he apt to do that often?"

"If he doesn't get his own way. He was also almost dismissed during first year for fighting." Lucy revealed. "I know he's my brother, but he's not exactly a nice person. When I saw him with Cassandra, I couldn't let the same happen to her that's happened to some of the other girls."

Harry's interest was now more than piqued. "Can you tell me about it?"

"He didn't ever hit them or anything like that; well not as far as I know he didn't." Lucy began to open up more to Harry. "But they

always ended up sleeping with him. I was never sure though if he used his ability on them or not. When I questioned him, he swore he hadn't, and said that they'd just been easy. I was too scared of him to push it."

"How long ago was this?" Harry continued with his questioning.

"The last girl I know he slept with was about three months ago. It was Emily." Lucy revealed. "She's over it but I still think it was hard for her to have to watch Duncan with Cassandra."

"Does she know about Duncan's talent?" Harry asked in a quiet voice which masked his inner anger.

"Yes." Lucy told him. "I tried to warn her when she first got involved with Duncan, but at the time she thought she was in love with him and refused to listen to me. Duncan told me to back off, so I did."

Harry got up. "Thank you for telling me this. I'm going to have to talk this over with Chief Bradford."

Lucy paled. "She doesn't know about Emily and Duncan."

"I need to examine Cassandra's memory of last night to try to ascertain whether Duncan did deliberately influence her." Harry explained. "And I don't think I'm going to be able to keep Emily out of the conversation, as from what you've just said, she knew about the bet. Am I correct?"

Lucy didn't want to tell on her friend, but she also knew that Harry would likely find out one way or another, and it would be better if she simply came clean. "She did, Sir."

Harry knew that Michaela wouldn't be happy to hear it as he was aware that she had a strict policy against this sort of thing, and tended to be less lenient than either he or Sirius would be. "Thank you for telling me. Now as my class is supposed to be starting in ten minutes, I suggest you head there. Please ask Cassandra to come

and see me when she arrives, and then tell the class that I'll be a little late and to start on chapter 14."

"I will, Sir." Lucy left feeling a whole better.

Fifteen minutes later, Cassandra knocked on Harry's door, entering when he called for her to come in. "Harry, before you say anything, I'm really sorry about last night."

"Cass, sit down." Harry moved to sit on the edge of the desk. "It's about last night that I want to talk to you about. I'd like to examine your memory of it, if you wouldn't mind."

"Why?" Cassandra's heart started to beat faster.

Harry immediately detected her discomfort. "I just need to check something. Now as I don't have my pensieve with me, I'll need to use Legilimency if that's alright."

"Okay." Cassandra met Harry's gaze and tried to relax.

Harry cast the spell and started to watch the memory, only to withdraw moments later as he could feel Cassandra fighting him. "You're not relaxing. I'll be back shortly."

When Harry returned five minutes later, he wasn't alone. "Auror Black, Chief Bradford would also like to view your memory of last night."

Cassandra paled, and then went red. "Yes, Sir."

Michaela placed a hand on Cassandra's arm. "Auror Black, please don't feel embarrassed. Auror Sebastian has briefly explained about last night, and I need to be sure that his suspicions are correct."

Cassandra frowned. "What suspicions, Ma'am?"

"I believe Trainee Starr coerced you last night, and I need to make sure that I'm right before I accuse him of anything." Harry placed the borrowed pensieve on the table. "Can I take the memory?"

Cassandra reluctantly agreed, and moments later found herself accompanying both Harry and Michaela into the pensieve. "This is so embarrassing."

Michaela gave the girl a consolatory smile. "We all make mistakes. It's how we learn but if your mistake was engineered, then I do have to know."

Cassandra watched her own actions with a burning face. Harry quickly squeezed her hand before letting go. "I see that you refused to accompany Trainee Starr several times before changing your mind. Can you tell me why, Auror Black?"

Cassandra recognized that the examination had now become a formal process. "I don't know, Sir. I just know that I didn't want to go with him until he kissed me. It was only after that that I changed my mind."

Michaela viewed the rest of the memory in silence up until Harry removed Cassandra from the bar. "Auror Sebastian, can you tell me why you appeared when you did?"

"Trainee Viking asked me to intercede." Harry had no choice but to tell Michaela. "She was worried that her brother was taking advantage of Auror Black. As you saw from the memory, I'm Auror Black's guardian, and as such had a duty to ensure her wellbeing."

"How did you get the message?" Michaela wondered how Lucy had contacted Harry, who she knew was staying in a Muggle hotel.

"From Auror Jenkins, who was with me at the time." Harry answered reluctantly. "She had a cell phone with her."

Michaela hadn't realized that Harry was dating one of the Aurors, but as she hadn't been a student, and it therefore wasn't against policy, she could do little about it. "Auror Sebastian, after reviewing this memory, I'm giving you the necessary authority to deal with Trainee Starr. Auror Black, if you'd like to come with me."

Cassandra gave Harry a worried glance as she left the room, and Harry then set off to fetch Duncan.

Once they were both in his office, Harry addressed Duncan. "I've spoken to Chief Bradford about you, Starr, and I've reviewed Auror Black's memory of last night, and I find myself singularly unimpressed. Chief Bradford has also reviewed it, and she too is of the same opinion I am."

"I didn't do anything wrong." Duncan protested.

"I disagree." Harry looked up at the young man he'd left standing in front of him. "Using your empathic capabilities without prior permission is against wizarding law, and as a trainee Auror, you should be well aware of this fact."

"I am aware of that." As wizarding law was part of the required course and was taught during first year training, Duncan had to acknowledge that he did know. "But I didn't use my empathic powers on Auror Black."

"If you didn't use them, then perhaps you would care to tell me why Auror Black refused to go home with you twice until you kissed her, and asked her again?" Harry had deduced that Duncan's empathic powers required touch via bare skin to become effective.

"Because she obviously changed her mind." Duncan answered glibly. "It's not my fault she couldn't decide straight away. You know what women are like."

Harry hid his disgust at Duncan's attitude. "So you're sticking to your story that you didn't use any form of coercion on Auror Black?"

"I am, Sir." Duncan met Harry's gaze without flinching.

"In that case I'm going to give you a choice." Harry's smile wasn't pleasant. "If you're willing to swear an oath to the effect that you did

not use your abilities in any way, shape or form upon Auror Black last night, then I will publicly apologize for embarrassing you, and the whole matter will be dropped. However, if you're unwilling to do so, then a reprimand will be placed on your file, you'll be subjected to three months' cleaning duty, after which you will be suspended without pay until 1st September 2005. At that time, if you so wish, you will be allowed to stay on the program but you will repeat all three years of training." Harry knew he had Duncan in a tight situation. "So what's it to be, Starr?"

"I want to file a complaint against you..." Duncan didn't answer Harry's question. "...for harassment, and I refuse to accept either alternative you are giving me."

"If you'll excuse me." Harry got up and left the room, only to return with Michaela Bradford. "In the light of your complaint, I am rescinding authority over this interview to Chief Bradford."

Michaela turned a stern face upon her trainee. "Trainee Starr, I am going to offer you the same alternatives that Auror Sebastian has given you. Or do you have a complaint you'd like to level against me?"

"No, Ma'am, I do not." Duncan glanced over at Harry. "But I still wish to file a grievance against Auror Sebastian."

"Noted." Michaela folded her arms. "Are you willing to swear an oath as Auror Sebastian outlined to you?"

"I am not, Ma'am." Duncan looked down at the floor as he spoke.

"Then effective immediately you are on report, you will report to Auror Filibuster, and you are no longer a third year trainee." Michaela's voice resonated with disappointment. "Should Auror Filibuster have anything derogatory to say about you during the three month period you will be on cleaning duty, your contract will be terminated. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Ma'am." Duncan had little choice but to agree.

“Now I wish to hear the basis for your complaint against Auror Sebastian.” Michaela demanded.

“I believe Auror Sebastian deliberately set out to embarrass me last night as I know he doesn’t like me, and this has influenced his actions against me.” Duncan set out what he thought Harry was guilty of.

“Auror Sebastian?” Michaela turned to Harry.

“I did not deliberately set out to embarrass Trainee Starr last night.” Harry explained himself. “My main concern was Auror Black and her wellbeing.”

Michaela turned to Duncan. “As you know, Auror Sebastian is Auror Black’s guardian, and I believe he was well within his rights to ensure that she wasn’t coming to any harm. So, unless you have anything else you want to add, the complaint is dismissed.”

Duncan did have something to say about it. “That’s not fair. He wasn’t acting as her guardian last night; he acted more like her lover. And he acted in exactly the same way when they were at a nightclub together. He was all over her when he was dancing with her.”

Knowing that in addition to being Cassandra’s guardian, Harry was also Cassandra’s mentor, and as such any fraternization between the two of them was against the rules. Not really believing it to be true but still having to ask, Michaela turned to Harry. “Auror Sebastian, are you in a sexual relationship with Auror Black?”

Harry thought he’d acted more like Cassandra’s father at the Minstrel but knew that Duncan had been right about the nightclub. “I am not, and I’m happy to swear an oath to that effect.”

“If you are willing to do so, then I will dismiss the complaint that has been leveled against you.” Michaela couldn’t deny to herself that she felt a sliver of satisfaction at thwarting Duncan.

Harry did so, acting as if the oath hurt as he finished. "May I sit down, Ma'am.?"

"Go ahead." Michaela instructed before turning to Duncan. "Your grievance against Auror Sebastian has found to be unsubstantiated, and is therefore denied. And before you say anything else, I can understand Auror Sebastian's dislike of you. Dismissed."

Duncan gave Harry a hate-filled glance before leaving the room. Michaela shut the door and flopped unceremoniously down onto a chair. "I want to kill that SOB."

"You're not alone." Harry sympathized with the tall, black woman whose face reflected her inner disquiet. "What he did was unconscionable."

"I'm disappointed in him." Michaela shook her head in dismay. "One of the main reasons we accepted him is his abilities, as academically, he's borderline. Like his mother before him, he's impervious to the Imperius curse and Legilimency, and his empathic abilities are an asset."

"Not when he uses them to fulfill a bet they're not." Harry wasn't happy at all. "You do realize that you're likely to hear from Sirius about this."

"I do, but this is my jurisdiction, and I believe I've dealt with it in a fair manner as have you." Michaela, like Sirius, brooked no outside interference in her decisions. "Do you agree?"

"Yes but it doesn't stop me wanting to forget about being fair and teaching Starr a lesson he'd never forget." Harry answered honestly.

"Right now I'm almost angry enough to let you." Michaela took a deep breath before turning to something that Harry had brought up. "Now even though I know it's none of my business, I'd like to know what Auror Jenkins was doing with you."

“We were on a date.” Harry didn’t explain any further than that. “I wasn’t aware that it was against the rules.”

Michaela confirmed Harry’s belief. “It isn’t. But I have to be honest and say that I don’t particularly encourage liaisons between staff members.”

“You don’t need to worry yourself anymore on that score.” Harry stood up. “Auror Jenkins and I have settled on just being friends.”

Michaela nodded. “Very well. Thank you for telling me.” Michaela decided to let Harry finish dealing with the remaining problems. “I’ll leave you to tie up the loose ends. You have my authority to deal with the perpetrators in any manner you see fit.”

“I should warn you that your daughter is involved.” Harry knew that Michaela wasn’t aware of the fact.

“And as I said, you may deal with her as you see fit.” Michaela knew that Emily, like the others, would have to take her punishment on the chin. “I take it that you won’t be punishing Lucy Viking?”

Harry set Michaela's incorrect assumption to rest. “Even though she came forward of her own free will, as well as trying to intercede on Auror Black’s behalf, she was part of this, and she’ll be punished accordingly. But speaking of Lucy, I think we might have another problem as I’m almost certain she’s being bullied by Starr. I’m also concerned that if he finds out that she interceded, he’s going to seek retribution.”

“This just gets better.” Michaela sat back down. “In that case I may have a solution for Lucy but I have a favor to ask of you, if she’s interested.”

“Go ahead.” Harry was willing to listen to Michaela’s request.

Michaela set out what she was looking for. “I’d like for Lucy to finish out her training at BritAD, and for her to leave today with Auror

Black.” Harry had told Michaela that he was sending Cassandra back home after he'd spoken to her again.

After mulling it over, Harry decided that Lucy would be better off away from her brother. “I can say yes in principle, but should Sirius disagree with my decision, then she'll have to return.”

Michaela understood only too well. “Thank you. Would you mind asking Lucy if she's interested, when you deal with everything else? I'd do it myself but I have work I need to get done before my meetings this afternoon.”

Harry recognized that Michaela now trusted him, and he acknowledged the fact. “I appreciate you letting me deal with this. And yes, I'll talk to Lucy.”

Michaela stood up again. “I'd best be off, Harry. We can talk more about this over dinner tomorrow night.”

Harry had been invited to dinner with Michaela and Nathan again. “I agree. Let's hope the rest of the day goes better.”

“I doubt it.” With that, Michaela headed off.

Harry headed for his classroom. When he entered it, he knew that Duncan had already obviously told the class what had happened, and Harry addressed the people he wanted to see. “Trainees Bradford and Viking, and Aurors Page, Black and Jenkins, please come with me. The rest of you can start the assignment that I've put on the board.” Harry flicked his wand towards the board and the assignment he'd written up when he'd first arrived at USAD that morning, appeared.

The five girls followed Harry out. Once they reached his office, Harry stood back to let them by. “Everyone in there.” Once they were all lined up in front of his desk, Harry turned to Lucy. “Trainee Viking, we'll deal with you first.”

Lucy was terrified. “Sir?”

Harry was a little worried that the girl would faint, as she was so pale, so he hurried to get on with things. "Trainee Viking, under normal circumstances you would be severely reprimanded for your knowledge of the bet between Auror Page and your brother, as it's one that might have been harmful to Auror Black. But under the circumstances, and given that you willingly came to me to explain, I've decided that while I'm not going to do that. However, I am still going to hand out some form of punishment."

Lucy had expected it, even though she'd come clean to Harry. "I understand, Sir."

"Do you have anything else you wish to add in your defense?" Harry asked the same question he asked anyone who appeared in front of him for disciplinary action.

"No, Sir." Lucy believed she'd told Harry everything she could.

"In that case, Trainee Viking, you'll be docked two weeks' pay for your part in this, serve two weeks' night time desk duty, and should you come up again for disciplinary action within the next three months, you'll be suspended until the final examinations. Is this clear?" Harry met Lucy's gaze.

Lucy let out a relieved sigh, and wiped away a few tears. "Yes, Sir."

Harry then turned to Cassandra. "Auror Black."

Cassandra could feel her heart beating faster as met Harry's eyes. "Sir?"

Harry got straight to the point. "Auror Black, while I'm aware that you're entirely innocent of any wrongdoing as far as the bet is concerned, you are still culpable for some of your actions."

Cassandra had a feeling that Harry was talking about how she'd acted towards him. "I'm aware that the remarks made by me last night were entirely inappropriate, Sir."

Harry acknowledged the fact. "Yes they were. But as most of them were of a personal nature, I'm going to ignore them. However, I cannot overlook the fact that you threatened me with a weapon, nor can I overlook your drunken behavior at the Minstrel. It is this second offense that I find most disturbing. Auror Black, while we are here, we both stand as representatives for BritAD. However, your drunken behavior last night tarnished the good reputation of both yourself and BritAD."

Cassandra gulped, as Sirius had something along these lines before agreeing to let her come out to USAD. "I'm sorry, Sir."

"Sorry, doesn't cut it, Auror Black." Harry snapped. "You've failed to represent BritAD in the way you should have, and I'm more than disappointed in you."

Cassandra said nothing, and hung her head.

Harry hated doing this to Cassandra but he knew that if he didn't, Sirius would; to say nothing of what Sirius would do to him if he failed to carry out his duties. "Auror Black, do you have anything to say in your defense?"

Cassandra looked up, answering Harry before looking back down at the ground. "No, Sir."

Harry could sense the shame that Cassandra was feeling. "Auror Black, due to your threatening behavior, I have no choice but to remove you from your current position at BritAD. You will also be assigned a new Mentor and will return to British Auror Division today."

Cassandra paled but said nothing as Harry continued. "And for failing to uphold the standards BritAD deem necessary for an ambassador, for the first two months when you return, you will be assigned cleaning duties, and thereafter reassigned to night shift desk duty for a further month. After this time you'll be assigned a new position."

"Yes, Sir." Cassandra's voice shook.

Harry had more to say. "I haven't finished yet, Auror. Furthermore, should I have cause to reprimand you again during the next six months, you will be stripped of your Auror's badge, suspended until 1st September 2005, and rejoin the trainee program as a third year trainee. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Sir." Cassandra struggled to hold back her tears.

Lucy interrupted. "Sir, may I say something?"

Harry knew it must be important for Lucy to step in. "Go ahead."

Lucy began. "I forgot to mention that Duncan's abilities come from a magical substance he secretes through his fingertips which lingers on the skin."

Harry wished that Lucy had mentioned this earlier. "Which means?"

"That it would probably have taken a little time for it to wear off, and Auror Black could still been under the influence of what he'd done to her when she attacked you." Lucy gulped at the angry look that chased across Harry's face as she thought he was angry that she hadn't told him. "I'm sorry I really didn't think."

"Thank you for telling me now." Harry mulled over what Lucy had said, and how long it had taken Cassandra to stop fighting him. "Auror Black, in the light of what Trainee Viking has revealed, I'm willing to review my decision in relation to your first offense. However, I'm not willing to do so in relation to the second offense."

"Thank you, Sir." Cassandra's voice was shaky and full of tears as she addressed Harry.

"Auror Black, my decision as to the cleaning and night desk duties therefore stand, but your six month probationary period will be reduced to three. However, after what has happened, I believe you will benefit from a change of mentor, so I will still be assigning a new one to you. Once you have finished night desk duties, you will be allowed to return to your original position." Harry could feel the relief

rolling off Cassandra. "Auror Black and Trainee Viking you may both wait outside."

After the girls had left, Harry turned to the final three girls. "I take it you all know why you're here?"

When all three nodded, Harry continued. "I'm well aware of the type of activities that both the trainees and Aurors indulge in, and as long as they're harmless, then I'm willing to overlook them even when I shouldn't. However, the bet that Auror Page and Trainee Starr indulged in could have had far reaching consequences for Auror Black, and this is something I cannot just dismiss."

Harry turned his attention to Emily. "Trainee Bradford, were you aware of the bet that had been made between Auror Page and Trainee Starr?"

"Yes, Sir." Emily acknowledged that she had been.

Harry then turned his attention on Louise in addition to Emily. "Auror Page and Trainee Bradford, were you both at the Minstrel last night during the time that the incident between Auror Black and Trainee Starr took place?"

Both girls confirmed that they were. Harry then directed his next question to all three of them. "I would like to know if any of you are aware of any abilities that Trainee Starr has."

Louise knew that she in deep trouble, and despite the friendliness Harry had previously displayed towards her, she remembered the warning that Harry had given to her and the others before first agreeing to go out for a drink with them. "I do, Sir. He's an empathic manipulator."

Emily also nodded. "Yes, Sir. I'm also aware of that fact."

Tabitha hadn't been, and her face reflected her horror. "No, Sir. I didn't know."

Harry could tell that her dismay was genuine. Harry therefore turned his attention to the two remaining girls. "Knowing of Trainee Starr's abilities, and the bet that had been made, did either of you attempt to intercede on Auror Black's behalf?"

Emily nodded. "I told Duncan not to do it."

"When he refused, did you make any other attempt to intercede?" Harry already knew that Emily hadn't done so from Lucy.

Emily was aware that if Harry knew that Duncan had refused to back off, then Lucy must have told him. "No, Sir."

Harry turned to Louise. "Did you make an attempt to intercede, Auror Page?"

Louise shook her head, and Harry looked from her to Emily. "Before I make any decisions as to your punishment for your involvement in this travesty, do either of you have anything at all to say in your defense."

Louise shook her head. "No, Sir, except that I didn't think about the consequences when I made the bet. And I can only offer to apologize to Auror Black."

Harry didn't respond to the offer and addressed Emily. "Trainee Bradford?"

"No, Sir." Emily knew that in addition to whatever punishment Harry was going to inflict on her, her mother was going to come down hard on her as well.

"Trainee Bradford, not only were you privy to an illegal bet, but you also compounded that mistake by failing to act when you were aware that Trainee Starr may have been using his empathic abilities upon Auror Black in a manner that was both illegal, and offensive. As such, I have decided that as from today you will be suspended until your final examinations." Harry informed her. "If you pass the final examinations, then your admittance to USAD will be on a twelve

month probationary period, rather than a six month period. If at any time during the twelve months you infringe any rule, no matter how slight, you will serve your third year again.”

Emily wanted to complain about the harshness of the punishment but didn't dare, as she knew that her mother was likely to make her punishment more severe if she did. “Yes, Sir.”

“You may go.” Once Emily had left, Harry then turned to Louise. “Auror Page. Not only did you instigate the illegal bet, but you were also aware of Auror Starr's unique capabilities, and did nothing to dissuade him from using them on Auror Black, nor did you aid Auror Black. Do you agree with my assessment?”

“Yes, Sir.” Louise couldn't stop her voice from shaking, and she was hard pushed to hold back her tears.

“As such, I therefore hold you as culpable as Trainee Star.” Harry's voice was cold and unforgiving as he addressed Louise. “Furthermore, as a fully qualified Auror, you, more than Trainee Starr, should have known better than to be a part of this.” Harry ignored the tears that were now trickling down Louise's cheeks. “Auror Page, as of now, you are stripped of your rank of Auror and suspended without pay until September 1st 2005. You are also demoted back to first year trainee. If, however, you decide not to follow the course again, then your employment will be terminated as from today. Do you understand?”

Louise couldn't speak but nodded her head. Harry finished off. “You have until the end of the day to make your decision. Please relay it to Chief Bradford as I have no wish to see you again. Now get out.”

Crying, Louise opened the door and fled past the past two girls who were still standing outside waiting for Harry. Harry could see that what he'd done had dismayed Tabitha. “Auror Jenkins, am I correct in stating that you had no idea of Trainee Starr's abilities, but you were aware of the illegal bet made between him and Auror Page?”

“Yes, Sir.” Tabitha answered.

Harry repeated his earlier statement that he'd made to the two other girls. "Before I make any decision as to your punishment for your involvement, do you have anything to say in your defense?"

Tabitha could hardly believe that this Harry was the same person she'd been talking with the previous night. "No, Sir."

"Auror Jenkins, as you were unaware of Trainee Starr's ability, and you were also not at the Minstrel, I have taken this into consideration." Even after their talk the previous night, Harry didn't treat Tabitha any differently than he would one of his own men. "So while I have decided to allow you to remain on active duty, you will be docked two week's pay for your part in this. Also, your application to take part in the exchange program has been denied, and I will not be allowing you to continue in my class. Furthermore, should anyone have cause to reprimand you again during the next three months, I will revoke my decision to let you remain on active duty as an Auror, and you will be suspended without pay for three months. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Sir." Tabitha knew that Harry could have stripped her of her rank, and was grateful that he hadn't.

Harry got up. "You have five minutes to collect your things from my classroom. Please tell the class that they are free to go but that I want them to have learnt Chapter 14 and completed the assignment by Monday. Dismissed, Auror Jenkins."

Tabitha hesitated. "Sir, before I leave, may I speak freely?"

"Go ahead." Harry remained where he was.

Tabitha gave a small smile. "After what's happened, I just wanted to assure you that what we discussed last night will remain between us." She then turned to go, only for Harry to stop her.

"Tabitha, wait." Harry stepped over to her and put a hand on her arm. "On an unofficial note, thank you for listening last night."

Tabitha gave Harry a huge smile. "Thank you, Sir, for listening to me. And Sir, I know you had to do what you did today, and that it couldn't have been easy. Dad heads up USAD, Los Angeles, so I know how tough it can be."

Harry hadn't connected Tabitha with Tobias Jenkins. "I take it you'll be hearing from him."

Tabitha grimaced. "And I believe he'll be a lot tougher on me than you were."

Harry knew that that was probably true. "I believe he might."

Tabitha held out her hand. "I hope we meet again, Sir."

Harry was impressed by how well Tabitha was behaving, and by her acceptance of what he'd done. Instead of shaking her hand, he pulled her into a hug. "I hope so too, Tabitha."

Tabitha hugged Harry back, before stepping away. "Am I dismissed, Sir?"

"You are, Auror Jenkins." Harry confirmed. After she'd gone, Harry called Cassandra and Lucy back in, before speaking to Lucy first. "Trainee Viking. There's something else I want to talk to you about before we've finished."

Lucy could see that Harry no longer looked so stern but she still wasn't sure whether she could relax or not. "What is it, Sir?"

Harry explained. "Given what's happened with your brother, Chief Bradford thinks it would be beneficial for you to finish out your training at BritAD, and for you to leave today with Auror Black. However, this is only on the proviso that Commander Black agrees to it."

Lucy was staggered. "I don't know what to say, Sir, except thank you. Particularly as I know that after today things are not only going to be difficult between Duncan and myself but the other girls as well. And I

think it would probably be better if I put some distance between myself and them.”

Harry agreed with her sentiment. “That’s settled then provided Commander Black agrees to the transfer. If so, then you’ll serve out your punishment at BritAd instead of here.”

“Thank you, Sir.” Lucy couldn’t believe the opportunity she was being afforded.

Harry could see that Lucy was delighted. “I suggest you go home and collect your things, before meeting me at the apparition point in an hour.”

“Yes, Sir.” Lucy left leaving Harry and Cassandra alone.

Harry relaxed. “I’m going to let Lucy stay in my apartment until I find somewhere more permanent for her.”

“She can stay in my spare room if she wants to.” Cassandra immediately offered.

“Thank you.” Harry put a hand on Cassandra’s arm, not sure if she would reject him. “Cass, I’m sorry.”

Cassandra burst into tears and let Harry draw her against him. Harry stroked her hair. “I had to do it. If I hadn’t, then Sirius would have.”

“He’d have been tougher on me.” Cassandra mumbled into Harry’s shirt.

“I know that, that’s why I did it.” Harry gently moved Cassandra so that he could see her face. “Cass, I’ve never ever apologized for punishing someone before but I felt awful dressing you down like that.”

“You had to Harry.” Cassandra had been warned by Sirius when she’d started that she, like any other Auror, would be subject to the rules, and despite being his daughter he couldn’t cut her any slack.

“It didn’t make it any easier.” Harry ran a thumb across Cassandra’s cheek. “Especially as I feel as though I should take some of the blame for it.”

Cassandra suppressed a shiver at Harry’s touch. “You mean because of Tabitha don’t you?”

“Yes.” Harry felt guilty about why Cassandra had left in the first place. “I shouldn’t have brought her back to the hotel.”

Cassandra didn’t really want to discuss Tabitha. “It doesn’t matter.”

“I didn’t sleep with her, Cass.” Harry wanted to Cassandra to know. “I was going to but I couldn’t do it.”

“Why not?” Cassandra couldn’t help but ask.

“Because when I kissed her all I could think about was you.” Harry admitted.

Cassandra didn't like hearing that Harry had kissed Tabitha but she was thrilled that he was beginning to admit how he felt. "Is that why you're changing my mentor?"

Harry had to acknowledge it was. "You know it is."

"I'm glad you did." Cassandra then stood on her tiptoes and kissed Harry on the lips.

When she went to pull back, Harry held her there for a moment, his lips gently exploring hers but he didn't attempt to deepen the kiss, before pulling away. "Cass, we need to talk but we can't do it here."

Cassandra smiled happily. "When you get back then?"

Harry agreed. "That would be best. Now we'd better go."

Harry went to turn away, only for Cassandra to stop him. "Harry, what happened to the other girls?"

"I may as well tell you, as you'll no doubt find out anyway." Harry then told her what punishments he had handed out. "If it had just been about the bet, then I'd have been able to go a lot easier on them but when you added in Starr's abilities, and their knowledge of it, I couldn't."

"I still think you were too hard on Louise." Cassandra felt sorry for the girl as she knew how hard it was to get through the training.

"What would you have done?" Harry was interested to know, particularly as Cassandra had been the injured party.

Cassandra thought about it for a few minutes before responding. "Suspended her without pay for three months, three months' cleaning duty when she returned, and a formal apology. I would also have had a citation made in her record that if she was in trouble again during a two year period then your original punishment of being stripped of her position should be instigated but I'd have only bumped her down to third year in that case."

Harry studied Cassandra's face as he thought about what she'd suggested. "I'll talk to Michaela tomorrow, and reconsider my original punishment but I'm not promising anything."

"Thanks Harry." Cassandra smiled up at him. "And I'll see you on Friday night?"

"No." Harry shook his head. "It's more than likely going to be Sunday night now. It will be almost midnight by the time I leave here on Friday, and I have to see Sirius on Saturday."

Cassandra blanched at the mention of her father. "Dad's going to kill me when he finds out."

"I'm afraid I can't help you with that one." Harry was about to leave when he turned back to his desk, and pulled out several vials before

removing his memories, and placing them inside. "You might want to give these to Sirius. He'll no doubt also want to see yours." Harry then also wrote out a transfer recommendation, and passed that to Cassandra. "And he'll need this for Lucy. I told her I'd meet her at the apparition point in an hour, so you've got about forty minutes. You'd better go pack."

Cassandra kissed Harry on the cheek. "I'll see you later."

Forty minutes later, Harry met both girls at the apparition point. "Trainee Viking, you'll be taking an international portkey back to London with Auror Black, who's kindly offered to let you stay with her until we set you up with something more permanent." Harry opened his trunk and removed one. "Auror Black, the password is your middle name and my last name."

"Thank you, Sir." Cassandra slipped it into her pocket.

Harry told Cassandra what else he wanted her to do. "When you arrive back today, tell Commander Black I'll speak to him by international floo on Monday morning."

Cassandra had hoped to put off speaking to Sirius until Monday but knew now that she couldn't. "Yes, Sir."

Harry smiled at Lucy. "I look forward to seeing you in my classes."

Lucy held out her hand. "Thank you for the opportunity, Sir."

"I hope you make the most of it." Harry let go, and turned back to Cassandra. "I'll see you in a week, Auror Black."

"Yes, Sir." Cassandra took Lucy's hand, and put her other hand into her pocket. "Eleanor Sebastian."

The two then vanished.

Next Chapter: Sirius finds out what's happened and Harry has a heart to heart with Cassandra.

Chapter 37: A Step Forward

11th December 2004

As it turned out, Harry didn't have to wait for Monday to speak to Sirius as less an hour after Cassandra left, he received an urgent message asking him to portkey home. Sighing, Harry operated a portkey and headed for Sirius' office, knowing that it was going to be bad when he found both Lucy and Cassandra standing outside of Sirius' office. Harry gave Cassandra a brief consolatory smile before heading inside. "You wanted to see me, Sir?"

"Come in and sit down." Sirius didn't look or sound happy. "I've spoken briefly to Cassandra who outlined what happened on Friday night. I've also viewed both your and her memories of the event. And I have to be honest, Harry. After taking everything into consideration, I believe you were far too harsh with your disciplinary action, particularly in Auror Jenkins' case. She had no idea of what Starr was capable of, and she even went as far as telling you about the bet, and accompanying you to the bar."

Harry realized that if Sirius was changing the decision he'd made, then Harry had overreacted. "I went too far, didn't I?"

"That's something of an understatement." Sirius snapped. He didn't mean to snap but he was tired as Faith had been unwell during the night, and having to come into work every weekend while Harry was away, was taking its toll. "I'd therefore like you to rescind Auror Jenkins' disciplinary action. I'm sure Michaela will agree with me that you were far too severe."

Harry let out a long sigh. "Do you want me to revoke Trainee Viking's punishment as well?"

Sirius shook his head. "No she was aware of her brother's capabilities, and even though I know she was frightened of him, she should have told someone. Your punishment isn't particularly harsh, so I'm letting it stand. I will also be accepting her transfer."

“Thank you, Sir.” Harry had been worried that Sirius would refuse it.

Sirius, however, hadn't quite finished. “As for the others, while I agree that you were correct in assigning Trainees Bradford and Starr the punishments you did, again I can't agree with what you did in Auror Page's case. I'd like this changed to two months suspension without pay, a nine month warning period, and if she messes up during this time, only then will your original penalty come into play.”

Harry disagreed. “I believe that Auror Page was as culpable as Starr, and I think that her punishment should stand.”

Sirius shook his head. “It's not up for debate, Harry. I want my revised punishment instigated.”

Harry unwillingly backed off. “I'll tell Chief Bradford.” Harry then wondered if Sirius would agree with him about his daughter. “And Cassandra?”

“I think you went overboard with her as well, Harry.” Sirius knew that he too would have been angry if Cassandra had spoken to him that way, but he still believed that Harry had overcompensated. “I know we have to take care when it comes to disciplining Cassandra so as not to show favoritism but contrary to what both you and my daughter obviously believed, I wouldn't have come down so hard on her. It certainly won't be the first time someone's gotten drunk while on assignment, and I'm damn sure it won't be the last.”

“I'm sorry, Sir.” Harry apologized.

Sirius passed over a piece of paper. “Again, I'm going to change your decision. First of all, I agree with your change of mentor for her. This is a copy of my recommendation for Cassandra's new mentor.”

Harry looked down at the paper. “You're going to be her mentor?”

“Not exactly.” Sirius set out what he was planning to do. “Because Cassandra doesn't go into the field, I believe she'll benefit from working in the various departments that we deal with. It will help give

her some insight into the paperwork she's handling. I'm going to assign the department heads to be her mentor for the week she's working in the department. They will, however, report back to me."

"When will she start?" Harry asked.

"When she's finished her two week stint in cleaning duties, and after the Christmas break, a further two weeks on the night desk." Sirius laid out the revised punishment he'd decided on for his daughter. "And also after I've torn a strip off her for her appalling behavior."

"I'm surprised that you're going to do that after what you've just said." Harry remarked.

"She still needs to know that I'm disappointed in her." Sirius then picked up Lucy Viking's transfer and signed it. "You can take this back with you, and give it to Chief Bradford today. Tell her I'll be seeing her on Monday morning."

Harry took the paper and slipped it into his inside pocket. "Do you need me for anything else, Sir?"

Sirius did. "Do you agree with me that you've made several serious judgments of error in how you handled this?"

"Up to a point, I do, Sir." Harry wondered if it was now his turn to be punished.

"I'm not even going to bother to ask if you've got anything to say in your defense, as I don't believe you have." Sirius was aware that despite Harry's agreement to the changes, Harry's comments about 'up to a point' meant that Harry still wasn't happy about the changes he'd made to Louise Page's disciplinary action. "I admit I was tempted for you to join Cassandra for a week of cleaning duties, but I've decided against it as I need you back here. However I'd like for you to think long and hard about this incident, and make sure that it doesn't happen again. Having once headed up BritAD, I would have expected you to be a little more objective than you actually were."

“Yes, Sir.” Harry had little choice except to agree with Sirius’ comments.

“Before you leave, you can take your memories back.” Sirius effectively dismissed Harry.

“Thank you, Sir.” Harry got up and went to retrieve his memories, only for Sirius to change his mind.

“Actually, please leave them.” Sirius also stood up and picked up the pensieve, moving it to his desk. “And send Trainee Viking in on your way out.”

“Yes, Sir.” Harry opened the door, and told Lucy to go in. Glancing behind him as the door shut, he let out a deep breath. “I’m glad to get out of there.”

Cassandra knew it had to be bad if Harry was expressing such a sentiment. “He didn’t really say much when I told him; just to wait out here.”

“He’s not happy, Cass.” Harry warned her. “I’d better go. If he catches me out here talking to you, then I’m going to be in more trouble than I already am.”

At Harry’s words, Cassandra changed her assessment of the situation from bad to catastrophic. “I’ll see you later.”

“I’ll go to your place.” Harry then apparated out to Cassandra’s apartment, leaving Cassandra alone.

Inside Sirius’ office, he sat down, leaving Lucy standing in front of him. “I’m Commander Black.”

“Trainee Viking, Sir.” Lucy’s voice shook.

“I’m well aware of who you are, Viking.” Sirius told the girl. “I’ve reviewed Auror Sebastian’s memories of the whole incident, and I’m

of the opinion that you got off lightly. But I'm willing to stand by his decision."

Lucy felt relief flood through her but didn't say anything as Sirius continued. "In the interests of keeping the good relationship I have with Chief Bradford, I have reluctantly agreed to your transfer. But I just want you to know that if I ever find you drawn to my attention for the wrong reason, you won't know what hit you. Do I make myself clear, Viking?"

"Yes, Sir." Lucy half wished he'd refused.

"You're dismissed. Please send Auror Black in on your way out." Sirius ordered.

"Yes, Sir." Lucy almost ran to get out of the room. She turned to Cassandra. "You're to go in."

"Wait for me here." Cassandra hadn't taken Lucy to her home yet, as the portkey Harry had given her had taken them both directly to the Ministry.

On entering the room, Cassandra shut the door and went to stand in front of her father. "You wanted to see me, Sir?"

Sirius immediately launched into a diatribe. "I do, Auror Black. I allowed you to go to USAD against my better judgment because I felt bad about what I'd done. But my behavior pales in significance to what you did."

Cassandra knew that she was in serious trouble if Sirius was calling her by her formal title. "I'm sorry, Sir."

Sirius ignored her apology. "Do you have any idea of the trouble that you've caused?"

"I didn't make the bet." Cassandra protested.

“Shut up, Cassandra.” Sirius didn’t want to hear it. “Starr would have had no chance of fulfilling that bet if you hadn’t been so bloody stupid as to go out to a bar on your own, especially after you told Harry that you were going to your room.”

“I didn’t want to listen to him with her.” Cassandra protested as their conversation morphed from official to personal.

“I gathered that from watching your memory.” Sirius got up and stood over his daughter. “You should have put up a silencing spell; not gone out.”

“I’m old enough to look after myself.” Cassandra knew she wasn’t doing herself any favors by arguing but she couldn’t help it.

Sirius grabbed Cassandra’s wrist and pulled her into the pensieve with him, activating the memory of her with her hands slid under the back of Duncan’s shirt as they kissed. “Does that look as if you’re old enough to look after yourself?”

Filled with shame, Cassandra hung her head. “No, Sir.”

“If Miss Viking hadn’t interceded, and Harry hadn’t come to get you, do you know where this would have ended?” Sirius’ voice began to get louder.

“Yes, Sir.” Cassandra couldn’t deny it.

“And what would have happened if you’d gotten pregnant?” Sirius snarled. “You’d have had to marry him.”

Cassandra paled at the thought. “I’m sorry, Dad.”

“Not as sorry as I am.” Sirius took a deep breath. “Despite the authority Michaela Bradford gave to Harry, I’m now going to have to portkey over to USAD to make sure that he hasn’t rocked the boat with his punishments.”

“But Harry hasn’t done anything wrong.” Cassandra stuck up for Harry.

“He went too far in your defense.” Sirius informed his daughter. “I don’t know if you realize it, Cassandra, but what you did has had serious repercussions for far too many people.”

“I’ve said I’m sorry.” Cassandra knew that Sirius hadn’t finished though as Sirius interrupted her.

“I warned you about Harry; I said that you’d get hurt.” Sirius wished his daughter had listened to him. “But I have to be honest, and admit that I didn’t expect it to lead to something as astronomically stupid as the stunt you pulled.”

Cassandra dropped her head as she couldn’t bear to look at Sirius but she still couldn’t avoid hearing the disappointment saturating his voice. “You’re really angry with me, aren’t you?”

Sirius thought that that was an understatement. “Incensed comes closer.”

Cassandra lifted her head to look at her father. “Are you going to punish me?”

“As a father, believe me, I was tempted to.” Sirius had been appalled at how Cassandra had spoken to Harry. “But as Harry’s already spanked you, I’m not going to go that far, even though I think you deserved it after hearing the language I did.” When Cassandra didn’t say anything, Sirius continued. “And if that wasn’t bad enough, you should have known better than to pull a wand on Harry. It’s one of the most basic rules of training.”

“I know, Sir.” Cassandra knew the rules by heart.

“It didn’t look like it.” Sirius snapped. “Let’s get out of here. I don’t need reminding of how foolish you’ve been.”

Shaking, Cassandra emerged from the pensieve and stood in front of the desk as Sirius sat down. "Dad..."

Sirius held up his hand. "I don't want to hear it, Cassandra. Words can't even begin to describe how disappointed I am in you. It hurts to know that I can't trust you."

Cassandra was more upset by Sirius' words than by Harry's punishment. "Dad, I..."

Again Sirius stopped her with a gesture. "I haven't finished yet. Cassandra, along with Harry, you were one of the two people I thought would be an asset to BritAD; instead you turn out to be its worst example. I feel let down by you, both as a father and as your employer."

At Sirius' final sentiment, Cassandra burst into tears, but Sirius ignored it and continued. "However, given that, I still don't agree with the decision Harry made about your disciplinary action. I'm therefore changing it to two weeks in cleaning duty, and two on the night desk. And I will be taking over as your mentor."

Cassandra managed to hiccup one word out in the middle of her sobs. "You?"

"Yes, Cassandra, me." Sirius then explained what he'd told Harry. "However, your return to your position as mine and Harry's assistant is dependent upon the reports I receive on you. If you mess up, then you can look forward to more time cleaning boots. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Sir." Cassandra only just got her words out as huge sobs wracked her body.

Despite his anger, Sirius couldn't abide seeing Cassandra so upset, and even though he knew he shouldn't, especially after lecturing Harry about not being objective, he got up and embraced his daughter. "Why couldn't you have just stayed in?"

Cassandra clung to her father. "I wish I had. I'm so sorry I disappointed you, Dad."

Knowing that it was heartfelt, this time Sirius acknowledged Cassandra's apology. "Apology accepted. I think you should also apologize to Chief Bradford."

"I already have." Cassandra had done so when Michaela had taken her out of the room. "As well as Harry."

"Has Harry gone to your apartment?" Sirius rubbed Cassandra's back as she continued to cry.

Cassandra didn't answer but she nodded instead.

"I'm going to take you home then. I'll come back for Viking." Sirius knew that Lucy couldn't get there on her own.

Cassandra let Sirius apparate her. Harry looked round as they apparated in. "Take Cassie for me."

Harry immediately got up and took the sobbing Cassandra into his arms, leaving Sirius to go back for Lucy.

Lucy gulped as Sirius opened his door. "Sir?"

Sirius took her arm. "We're leaving."

A few moments later, Lucy found herself in a spacious apartment. Sirius pointed to the door to the spare room. "That's your room through there. There's a bathroom beyond it. The kitchen is there. Help yourself to anything you want." Not in the mood to indulge in small talk, Sirius then vanished.

Her legs shaking, Lucy collapsed onto the sofa just as Harry came out of Cassandra's room. "I've made a horrible mistake coming here."

“No, you haven’t.” Harry said gently. “Commander Black’s said his piece now. Just keep under the radar and you’ll do fine. Now do as Cass has, and go take a bath or a shower.”

Lucy just wanted to escape from a horrible day, and decided that she’d have a very early night. “Goodnight, Sir.”

“ Goodnight.” Harry went back into Cassandra’s bedroom and knocked on the bathroom door. “Cass, are you decent?”

“ Hold on.” Cassandra grabbed her wand, and conjured more bubbles. “Come in.”

Harry opened the door. “Are you alright now?”

Cassandra wiped away what was left of her tears. “Dad was more than a little rough on me, but I suppose I should have expected it.”

“Yes, you should.” Harry sat on the edge of the tub.

Cassandra started to cry again. “Sorry.”

Harry felt guilty, and backpedaled. “Cass, it’s over for now. And you should know that you weren’t alone in messing up. Sirius sent me off with a flea in my ear.”

Not expecting that, Cassandra’s mouth fell open. “Dad punished you?”

“No, but the underlying message was that if I mess up like this again, he probably will do.” While sitting waiting for Cassandra to arrive, Harry had thought about what he’d done. In retrospect, he realized that he’d been overprotective of Cassandra, and also angry at her for kissing Duncan. He also felt a great deal of guilt knowing that it would never have happened if he hadn’t taken Tabitha back to the hotel suite. “And I don’t blame Sirius to be truthful. I let my personal feelings for you dictate my actions.”

“So what is going to happen?” Cassandra wiped her tears away.

“I’ve got to change some of the punishments I handed out.” Harry then told Cassandra about what Sirius had told him to do. “So I’m going to bite the bullet, apologize to Michaela and to Tabitha. However, I meant what I said about not wanting to see Louise again. And I should also apologize to you. Cass, when I invited Tabitha back, I was being selfish, and only thinking of myself. So I’m sorry for hurting you.”

Cassandra decided to be honest with Harry. “Harry, when I heard you two together, it did hurt. It hurt that you preferred to be with her.”

“Cass, it had nothing to do with preferring to be with her.” Harry reached out and stroked Cassandra’s face. “And everything to do with my attraction to you. I thought that if I pushed you away, my feelings for you would eventually fade. Instead I ended up spilling my guts to Tabitha, and admitting that that wasn’t the case.” Harry stiffened. “Someone’s just apparated in.”

“Cassie?” Sirius’ voice reached the couple’s ears, as he called out to his daughter.

Harry stood up. “Cass, I’ve got to go. I’m supposed to report back to Michaela.”

“Can you come back afterwards?” Cassandra wanted to continue talking now that they’d started.

Also aware that they needed to talk, Harry agreed. “I’ll be back as soon as I can.” Harry then operated his return portkey, and vanished.

Remembering her Dad, Cassandra climbed out of the bath. “I’m in the bath, Dad, and I’ll be out in a second.”

Sirius waited in the sitting room for Cassandra to use a hurried drying spell, and to slip on a robe, looking worriedly at her when she came back in. “I realized that I just couldn’t leave things as they were between us. So I came back to see if you were alright.”

“I’m fine now.” Cassandra assured her father. “Harry talked things through with me.”

Sirius scowled. “He’s in your bathroom?”

“No, Dad.” Cassandra found she was glad that Harry had left. “He’s returned to USAD.”

“Good.” Sirius relaxed. “I’m also here to issue an invitation to Sunday lunch tomorrow. Faith said that both you and Lucy are to come over.”

Cassandra spared a glance at the spare room. “I’m not sure if that’s a good idea.”

“I’ve said what I needed to, Cassie; to both of you. So I suggest that you simply chalk this up to experience, and put it behind you. The same goes for Miss Viking.” Sirius placed a hand on his daughter’s shoulder. “So tomorrow bring her over. Lunch will be at two.”

“Okay, Dad.” Cassandra found herself being pulled into a hug. “Thanks for coming back to see me.”

“I knew you’d end up fretting all night, if I didn’t.” Sirius kissed Cassandra on the forehead. “Now I suggest you get some sleep, and I’ll see you both tomorrow. Goodnight, Cassie.”

“Goodnight, Dad.” With that, Sirius vanished.

Meanwhile, Harry had arrived back at USAD where he headed off to see if Michaela was still there. She was. Harry subsequently told her what Sirius had asked for.

Michaela thought about what Sirius had asked. “I don’t agree.”

Harry wanted to bang his head on the table. “What would you recommend, Ma’am?”

“Auror Jenkins’ punishment will be rescinded but she’ll still receive a reprimand on her file. She knows that I don’t allow gambling in any format, but I’ll drop the rest of the action. And as for Auror Page, I agree with you that she was as culpable as Starr, but she’s a damn good Auror and I don’t want to lose her, so I’m reluctantly going to go with Sirius’ ruling.” Michaela wrote out her decision, and passed a copy to Harry. “Tell Sirius he doesn’t need to come over, and that overall I’m more than happy with how you’ve dealt with the situation. Will I still see for you for Sunday dinner tomorrow?”

“One o’clock?” Harry checked that he’d got the time right.

“One o’clock.” Michaela confirmed. “You’re dismissed, Harry.”

Harry smiled and headed off to buy sandwiches and wine which he took with him when he returned to Cassandra’s. Knocking on Lucy’s door, he found that she was fast asleep, and he left her a note on the kitchen table telling her that she’d got food in the fridge.

When he opened Cassandra’s door, she too was sleeping. Harry put down his things, the sound of the rustling bag, disturbing her. “Are you alright?”

“Just tired.” Cassandra sat up. “Dad came round and invited Lucy and me to lunch tomorrow. He said that he’s said everything he going to but I’m not so sure, especially as he’s got to go over to USAD.”

“Michaela said that he doesn’t have to. Can you tell him that she said she’s generally happy with how I’ve handled things, and give him this?” Harry placed the copy of Michaela’s decision on the chest of drawers. “And now that that’s sorted, and given what’s happened, tonight might be a good time to try and sort things out between us.”

“Okay then.” Cassandra looked expectantly at Harry. “Are you going to start or shall I?”

Harry could see that Cassandra obviously had something she needed to say. “You can.”

Cassandra started with her most obvious question. "If you liked me, why did you keep pushing me away?"

Harry thought for a few moments before answering. "Because up until today, I was your mentor, Cass; to say nothing of the fact that your Dad would have a meltdown if I was to get involved with you."

"I'm well aware of that." Cassandra got up off the bed, and even though she was nervous, decided to be blunt about how her feelings for Harry. "But you're not my mentor now, and this isn't about what Dad wants; this is about what we want. And I know that I want to be with you Harry, and not just as your friend. I've tried to ignore how I feel about you, and I've tried dating other people but you're the person I want to be with. And I've felt like this almost since we started working together."

Harry's feelings also dated back almost as far. "And I've been attracted to you for almost as long, but given time, I'd hoped that the attraction between us would eventually fade."

"It hasn't though, has it?" Cassandra knew that Harry hadn't realized that for her it was more than attraction.

"No." Harry went to run his hand through his hair. "Not on my side anyway."

"And as I've already said, nor on mine." From his actions, Cassandra could see that Harry was agitated. "When I'm with you all I know is that I'm happy."

"And I'm happy when I'm with you." Harry admitted.

Cassandra's heart felt as if it wanted to dance for joy at Harry's words. "Harry, I.."

Harry interrupted her. "I haven't finished yet." Harry put his hands on Cassandra's waist. "Cass, when I'm with you, I want to hold you all the time. When we watch TV together, I don't ask you if you want to

cuddle up with me to be polite; I do it so that I can feel you against me.”

Cassandra’s heartbeat began to increase. “I like it when you hold me like that.”

“And I like that you like me doing it.” Harry kissed Cassandra’s forehead. “Cass, before this goes any further, you should be aware that whatever decision we make tonight is going to have consequences.”

Cassandra lifted her head up to look at Harry. “I know that.”

“I’m not sure you do.” And Harry wanted to make sure that she really did. “If we take this step, we can’t ever go back to the type of relationship we have now. Things will always be different. Cass, are you willing to risk our friendship because if things don’t work out between us, then that’s what might be at stake.”

“I don’t know.” Cassandra bit her lip. “I just know that I can’t keep ignoring this. What do you want?”

Harry knew exactly what he wanted. “I want to spend time with you, and I want to have a relationship with you that goes beyond friendship.”

“And I want the same.” Cassandra then closed her eyes as Harry lowered his head and kissed her. After a while one kiss became two, and two, three. Cassandra eventually lost count as she molded herself to Harry’s body, moaning as his mouth left hers to travel down her throat.

At the sound, Harry pulled away. “I think that perhaps I should go.”

Cassandra protested. “I don’t want you to go.”

Harry gave a tiny, rueful smile. “Cass, if I stay, we’re going to end up making love.”

Cassandra smiled nervously. "I've never..."

Harry cut her off. "I know, Cass." Harry gently kissed Cassandra again. "Cass, I mean it when I say that I want more from you than friendship but because I care about you, I think you should take some time to think about this."

Cassandra was confused. "Why?"

Harry was mindful that Cassandra wasn't going to like what he was going to say. "Because as I've told you before, your first time should be with someone you love, and who loves you. And as much as I care about you, I can't lie and tell you that I do love you."

Cassandra felt her heart contract at Harry's admission. "Harry, I don't want you to lie and tell me that you do love me when you don't. I'd rather you were just truthful with me."

Harry used his fingertips to brush across Cassandra's lips, as he told her how he felt. "Cass, I care more for you than I do for anyone else, and I've never wanted anyone as much as I want you right now."

Cassandra had never been looked at before in the way Harry was staring at her, and she struggled to answer him. "I... I..."

Harry finally gave into what he really wanted. "Cass, can I spend the night with you?"

Cassandra swallowed hard, knowing that she'd probably eventually regret it if she said yes but that she'd regret it equally if she said no. Desire warred with commonsense; desire winning out. "Yes."

At Cassandra's declaration, Harry replaced his fingertips with his mouth as he pulled Cassandra further into his arms to kiss her. As he did so, Cassandra locked her hands tightly behind Harry's neck trying to draw him deeper into the kiss. Harry responded by sliding his tongue in to tangle with Cassandra's, and increasing the pressure. Harry knew that he was being a little rough and that Cassandra would probably have a bruised mouth in the morning. Cassandra, however, matched Harry's passion as she kissed him back just as fiercely.

Wanting to touch him, Cassandra began to run her hands over Harry's shirt, pulling open the buttons so that she could touch his chest, loving the way he felt under her fingers. Harry had the same need and instead of taking the time to unbutton her top, Harry ripped it open, the sound of tearing fabric making Cassandra flinch. "I'll buy you a new one." Harry promised before dropping his head to plant kisses over the lush curves of Cassandra's breasts before taking her nipple into his mouth.

Cassandra arched against Harry. "Oh, Harry."

Cassandra's exclamation brought Harry back to himself yet again, and he felt guilty about what he was about to do; knowing that he wouldn't be able to tell her that he loved her. "Cass, perhaps we shouldn't..."

"Not this time, Harry." Cassandra didn't want Harry to stop and grabbing his hair, she pulled his mouth back up to hers.

No more words were spoken as time almost seemed to pass by in a haze of frantic hands and mouths. Harry eventually broke away from kissing Cassandra. "Now's the time to say no, Cass."

Cassandra shook her head. "I don't want to."

Harry picked Cassandra up and lowered her onto the bed, before casting contraceptive and silencing spells, and dropping his wands onto the floor. After that, time blurred for Cassandra as Harry used his hands and mouth on her until, without any real memory of how it had happened, Cassandra found herself lying naked beneath Harry as they kissed repeatedly. All at once nerves assailed her as Harry gently nudged her legs apart, and the enormity of what she was about to do struck her full force. Harry sensed her withdrawal almost immediately. "Cass?"

"I'm frightened it's going to hurt." Cassandra could hear her voice shaking. "Stupid isn't it?"

“No it’s not, as you don’t know what to expect.” Harry stroked her hair away from her face. “This first time might be a little uncomfortable but I’ll do everything I can to try and make sure that it isn’t.” As much as he wanted to make love to her, Harry didn’t want to pressure her. “However, I’ll stop if you’re not ready for this.”

“No.” Cassandra touched Harry’s face. “I want to.”

At her words, Harry resumed kissing and caressing Cassandra until she began to relax once more. Only once Cassandra had begun to cry out and arch against him seeking out something she didn’t quite understand, did Harry move to join them together. Knowing it would be better for her, Harry didn’t stop until he was fully enclosed inside of her warmth before stilling to allow Cassandra to get used to the feeling.

After a few moments the stinging sensation that had accompanied Harry’s intrusion started to dissipate, and Cassandra kissed Harry, signaling without words that she wanted to go on. As he began to move, Cassandra remained motionless at first, not entirely sure of what to do. Before long, however, instinct took over and she began to move with Harry, moaning as Harry again covered her mouth with his. As heat began to build up inside of her, Cassandra didn’t really know what was happening; she just knew that she ached. As she wriggled under Harry, he stopped, thinking he was hurting her. “Cass?”

Cassandra was almost frightened that Harry was going to leave her feeling like that. “Please don’t stop, Harry.” Harry understood then what was wrong and began to increase the pace. Almost immediately the same heat started to build once more inside of Cassandra. As the sensation grew more intense, Cassandra started to feel overwhelmed and grabbed at Harry’s back in panic. “Harry.”

Feeling her beginning to shake, Harry murmured against her throat. “Just relax and let it happen, Cass.” Trusting Harry, Cassandra wrapped her legs more tightly around him and arched up to meet him. As she did so, waves emanating from the pit of her stomach seemed to radiate out all over her body, and crying out she sank her teeth into Harry’s shoulder, unintentionally drawing blood. The most primal part

of Harry reacted to the bite Cassandra had inflicted on him, and he was therefore caught off guard as his own release hit him moments later.

Surprised by the suddenness and intensity, Harry could do little except hold on tightly to Cassandra as he shook. As the feeling began to subside, and Harry got his breath back, he knew that he must be getting heavy. Rolling to his side, he pulled Cassandra with him so that she was lying on her side facing him.

As he did so, Cassandra noticed the bite she'd inflicted. "I'm sorry."

"It doesn't hurt, and it'll soon heal." Harry brushed Cassandra's concern about the bite aside. "Are you alright?"

"Yes." Cassandra felt a tad tender but little more than that. Silence fell for a few minutes until Cassandra finally said something. "Does it always feel like that?"

"No." Harry answered truthfully. "But it can do if your partner cares enough about your feelings to make it that way."

"Then thank you." Cassandra touched Harry's face; still not quite able to believe what they'd just done. "I know you probably don't want to hear this but Harry, I love you."

Harry felt his stomach go into freefall. "Cass..."

Cassandra put a finger over his lips. "Harry, I know how you feel about love; you've made it quite clear often enough. I'm not trying to make you feel guilty or trapped. I just wanted to be as honest with you as you were with me. I couldn't have made love with you without feeling like that about you."

Harry held Cassandra close. "I don't want to hurt you, Cass."

"You won't Harry." Cassandra kissed his chest. "I knew what I was doing when I said I wanted you to stay."

Harry wasn't so sure. "I do care about you, Cass."

"I know you do, Harry." Cassandra yawned and closed her eyes.

Despite what she'd told him, Harry couldn't help but smile to himself as Cassandra fell asleep within moments. "And I thought it was my job to fall asleep first." Harry tightened his hold on Cassandra before also falling asleep.

When Cassandra woke up the next day, Harry had already gone.

15th December 2004

Cassandra headed into work where she greeted the man in charge of assigning what she had to do. "Good morning, Auror Grant."

"Good morning, Auror Black." Richard Grant handed her a piece of paper. "This is your revised schedule for the remainder of your punishment."

"Thank you." Cassandra scanned down the paper and groaned. "What deity did I offend?"

"The one that put you here in the first place." Richard smiled. As Commander Black's daughter, he'd expected Cassandra to be full of herself and to complain about what he'd allocated her. Instead she'd quietly got on with everything he'd assigned.

"I'd better head off then, Sir." Cassandra popped the paper into her pocket, and headed for the training center where she'd been assigned to help Harry with his physical training lessons. As she walked, she wondered if Harry would treat her differently, especially as she hadn't seen him since they'd slept together. She certainly hadn't expected to see Harry so soon but as the students had exams on the Friday he was due back, and with Michaela's blessing, Harry had returned to BritAD three days earlier than he should have; mostly in order to save Sirius from having to go over the course material with the students in preparation for the exams. Harry had therefore sent a note to Cassandra saying that while he was coming back early, he

wouldn't be returning from USAD until late the previous night, so he'd see her after work.

When Cassandra arrived at the classroom, she found that the lesson had already begun. As the lesson progressed, Cassandra found that she needn't have worried about Harry's treatment of her, as she picked herself up off the floor for the third time. Harry turned to the class. "Can anyone tell me what Auror Black did wrong?"

Lucy, who in addition to attending classes was also covering night duty, put up her hand. "She turned her back on you, Sir."

"Never ever turn your back on anyone." Harry stopped Cassandra from returning to her seat. "Auror Black, remain where you are." Harry turned back to the class again. "I'm now going to give a demonstration of how to deal with an attack from behind. Auror Black, if you wouldn't mind walking across the dais for me. When I attack you, react."

"What's permissible, Sir?" Cassandra enquired.

"As long as I can cure myself, then anything." Harry grinned to himself, not expecting Cassandra to be able to hurt him. "Off you go, Auror Black, and try and make it last as long as possible."

Having seen how quickly Harry usually dispatched his adversaries, the class sniggered to itself as Cassandra turned her back on Harry, and began walking.

Harry was on her within an instant, his hand snaking around her throat, and one around her waist. Cassandra immediately dropped to one knee, grabbed Harry's arm by the shoulder, and threw Harry over her head while at the same time she withdrew her spare wand and held it over him. "You're dead, Auror Sebastian." Cassandra was grinning triumphantly as she looked down at Harry.

The class was stunned. No-one had ever been able to take Harry down before.

“Normally, I’d agreed with you but not this time.” As he spoke, Harry grabbed Cassandra’s arm using it as a ladder to get up before disarming her, and petrifying her. “So please tell me what Auror Black failed to do.”

Lucy put up her hand again. “She shouldn’t have stopped to show off, Sir.”

“And...” Harry asked.

One of the male trainees answered. “She should have disarmed you, and rendered you unable to fight back, in the same way you did with her, Sir.”

“You’re correct, Channing.” Harry then released Cassandra from the spell, and they shook hands. “You may sit down now.”

Cassandra headed back for her chair, grateful to be out of the spotlight.

Harry turned to the class. “As Auror Black has just demonstrated, no-one is infallible. I might seem that way, but I’m not. If she’d follow through, she’d have beaten me. So who’s next?”

A slew of hands rose into the air, and Harry picked one out. At the end of the demonstration, Harry dismissed the students for lunch. He then turned to Cassandra. “I can’t stop as I’ve got a lunch meeting with Sirius before coming back here, so I’ll see you tonight.” With that, Harry apparated out.

When Harry arrived at her apartment, Cassandra wasn’t in the sitting room as he expected. Knocking on her bedroom door, he waited for Cassandra to answer. When she didn’t, he let himself in and realized that Cassandra was in the shower. Opening the bathroom door, he put his head into the room. “Cass?”

Cassandra gave a scream; she hadn’t heard Harry with the water running. Pulling the towel around herself she opened the shower door. “Harry, you frightened me.”

“Sorry.” Harry leant against the wall. “Would you like to go out to dinner tonight?”

“Once I’ve showered, I would.” Cassandra didn’t quite meet Harry’s eyes as she responded.

Harry noticed and walked across the room, placing his hands on Cassandra’s upper arms. “I did warn you that things would change between us if we took that step.”

“It’s just...” Cassandra finally met Harry’s eyes. “It was easier in class. You treated me the same, and I knew what to do. Now I don’t.”

“Just be yourself.” Harry could feel Cassandra trembling.

“But what I said to you after we’d...” Cassandra could feel that she wanted to cry. “I shouldn’t have said it.”

“Did you mean it?” Harry asked quietly.

Cassandra couldn’t stop the tears that had been threatening. “If I say yes, then you’re going to end it now, aren’t you?”

“No, I’m not.” Harry didn’t want to as he felt differently about Cassandra than he had about anyone since Mione. “But I feel bad about not being able to say the same back to you.”

Cassandra looked up, tearstains marring her cheeks. “Harry, I don’t need to hear you tell me you love me; I just want to be with you.”

“And I want to be with you.” Harry released Cassandra’s shoulders and used both of his thumbs to brush away the wetness that still coated her cheeks. “Did you finish showering?”

Cassandra nodded her head. “Yes.”

“Pity. I was going to join you.” Harry watched a delicate bloom flush Cassandra’s cheeks. “Sometimes I forget how young you are.”

Cassandra's face fell. "Does my age bother you?"

Harry shook his head. "Not at all."

There was something else that Cassandra had also wondered about. Gathering up her courage, she asked the question. "And does it bother you that I'm not like Tonks?"

Judging from the way that Cassandra was clinging tightly to her towel, Harry guessed that she was still going to be a little uncomfortable being naked around him, so he picked up Cassandra's robe. "Put this on." Harry turned away to let her pull it on.

Cassandra wrapped it around herself before tapping Harry on the shoulder. "I'm dressed."

"Come here." Harry took Cassandra's hand and led her outside to sit on the bed. "Cass, when we slept together I knew that you had little to no experience of anything other kissing. If it had bothered me, I'd never have slept with you."

"But Tonks said that you and she..." Cassandra knew quite a lot from talking to her cousin.

"I think I can guess what Tonks said." Harry interrupted Cassandra. "And I'm not going to lie to you, Cass. Tonks was more than capable in the bedroom, and yes, I enjoyed the sex we had together. But it's different with you. I felt more of a connection with you when we made love than I ever did during my time with her, or even with Seville for that matter."

Cassandra was surprised by Harry's words. "But Seville was your wife."

"It doesn't matter what she was." Harry leant forward and kissed Cassandra before continuing. "I feel closer to you than I ever felt to her. And that was before we even slept together."

“Harry, would you hold me?” Cassandra felt like crying again at Harry’s words, and she really needed to be close to him.

Harry embraced Cassandra, feeling her relax against him. After a few minutes, he asked her the same question he had when he arrived. “Now would you like to go out to dinner?”

Cassandra shyly shook her head. “I’m not really that hungry right now.”

“Would you like to stay in then?” Harry by now had moved his hands to the front of Cassandra’s gown where the belt joined it together.

“I think so.” Cassandra shivered as Harry undid her robe and his hands stole inside.

“Then we’ll stay in.” Harry pushed Cassandra’s robe off her shoulders and pulled her down onto the bed with him.

Friday Night

Harry apparated into Cassandra’s apartment to find her alone. “Where’s Lucy?”

“Hello to you too.” Cassandra yawned.

“Hello.” Harry thought Cassandra looked tired. “Cleaning duty sucks doesn’t it?”

“Yes.” Cassandra pulled a face. “During the last few days, I think every single person at BritAD must have filed past the boot and uniform room to get a look at me.”

“That’s why cleaning duty is assigned.” Harry sat down. “If you’re down there, then everyone knows that an Auror or Trainee has screwed up and they’re being punished. And it’s also why there are no elves in that section. There’s always someone like you or me to do the grafting instead.”

Cassandra's back was killing her. "You've done it before?"

"More than once." Harry revealed. "And believe me, I hated it as well. I'm sure they found extra pairs of boots and the like just for me."

Cassandra laughed. "I thought the same. I've never unthreaded so many pairs of boots to clean them before in my life, and I had to do them by hand."

"It doesn't get any better." Harry warned. "But you'll be pleased to learn that even though I'm no longer your mentor, Sirius thinks helping me will be a good way of keeping up with your combat techniques as you're not in the field. So you're going to be my classroom assistant and guinea pig every Friday from now on, so no cleaning duties on that day or night duties on a Thursday."

"Joy." Cassandra dropped onto the sofa as she thought about how much she ached after Harry's lessons. "Just like being back at school."

"Except no Snape." Harry reminded her. "Now are you going to tell me where Lucy is?"

"Dad chivvied the Academy into finding her a room in a house with several of the other students. She moved out last Tuesday. I thought you might have noticed on Wednesday." Cassandra knew that Sirius had done it for her so that she could have her privacy back, more than for Lucy.

"My mind was on other things." Harry grinned as he sat down with Cassandra. "Unfortunately I'm going to be busy tomorrow until goodness knows when but I'm only on a half day on Sunday, so do you want to go out to dinner with me then?"

"Don't tell me. You've got nothing in the cupboard and you can't be bothered to go shopping?" Cassandra knew that her own cupboards were bare, and she'd been too tired to go shopping herself, not usually getting home until almost nine. Lucy had done a little

shopping but even that food had gone now, so Cassandra had been stopping at a local cafe to eat on the way home.

“You’ve got it in one.” Harry stood up. “I’m off to shower and to try to get an early night.”

Cassandra yawned again. “I’m hitting the shower and going to bed as well, Harry. So I’ll see you on Sunday I suppose.”

Harry gave a slightly lecherous smile. “I wasn’t exactly planning to go home and shower.”

“I thought you wanted an early night.” Cassandra pointed out.

“I do but I didn’t say alone.” Harry grabbed Cassandra around the waist. “So do you want shower with me?”

“Do I have a choice?” Cassandra started unbuttoning Harry’s shirt.

“Not really.” With that Harry threw Cassandra over his shoulder, and headed for the bathroom.

Next Chapter: As Luna’s wedding day dawns, Cassandra’s happy world disintegrates into a nightmare as Thomas puts his plans into action.

Chapter 38: Taken

23rd December 2004

Harry buttoned up his shirt. "Cass, stop panicking."

"Harry, we're going to be late." Cassandra tugged her dress back on. "Why did I let you do this to me again?"

"Again?" Harry queried.

"Harry, I've nearly been late for work every day since you got back, and it's all your fault." Cassandra pointed out.

Harry kissed the back of Cassandra's neck. "You shouldn't be so irresistible." Harry then flicked his wand and the zip on Cassandra's dress did itself up. "And you shouldn't look so good in that dress."

Cassandra couldn't help but smile. "Harry, you're terrible."

"And you love it." Harry cast another spell and Cassandra's hair reverted to the carefully coiffed look it had had half an hour before. "Where did I put my shoes?"

"Accio Harry's wedding shoes." Cassandra called out and she ducked as they flew from the far corners of the room where Harry had thrown them. "If I'm late, Luna will kill me."

"The wedding doesn't start for well over an hour." Harry snaked his arm around Cassandra's waist. "Now take a deep breath."

Cassandra relaxed. "I still find it hard to believe that Luna's getting married."

"Xander has to go home, and it's the only way she can go with him. Can you imagine Grimstock Lovegood letting his niece live in sin?" Harry had met this world's version of Grim and found him to be a dour but good sort of fellow.

“No.” Cassandra sighed.

Harry chuckled her under the chin. “Now stop moping and kiss me.”

“Harry, that’s how we ended up on the floor last time.” Cassandra nevertheless did as Harry demanded, moaning lightly as Harry’s mouth left hers and started to make its way down her neck. Coming to her senses, Cassandra pushed him away. “Harry, we can’t.”

“Alright, alright.” Harry let go of her and dutifully finished putting on his shoes. “Let’s go.”

Cassandra took a deep breath as the international portkey kicked in. She groaned as they landed at USAD, L.A. bypassing Customs. “I hate those things.”

“You did remember to take your potion, didn’t you?” Harry asked in concern.

His question was answered as Cassandra threw up. Harry sighed and fished in his pocket for an anti-nausea potion. “Take this.”

Cassandra took it quickly as Harry cleaned up. “You distracted me.”

“Let me look at your dress.” Harry checked her dress over. “It’s fine. A breath freshening charm, and we’ll be on our way.”

“Give me a minute.” Cassandra felt the whoosh of the charm as it cleansed her mouth. “I’ll apparate myself.”

“Do you know where the Hotel Del Coronado is?” Harry asked.

“No but I don’t want to side apparate.” Cassandra whined.

“Tough.” Harry took her arm. “Take a deep breath.”

Cassandra did as Harry ordered and staggered as they arrived. "Don't move me." Harry waited patiently as Cassandra took several deep breaths before straightening up. "I'm okay now."

"Let's go then." Harry led Cassandra towards the area that had been designated for the wedding. Before they got there, they found a very nervous Xander pacing up and down, a red-headed girl trying to calm him down. "Xander, you look worried."

"Harry, what if she doesn't show up?" Xander had worked himself up into a frenzy.

"She'll show up." The red-head turned to Harry. "Tell him."

Harry patted Xander on the back. "Luna will be here. Cassandra is going to join her now."

"Sorry but after screwing up my first wedding, I'm a little afraid that karma is going to come and bite me in the ass." Xander then took a deep breath and did the necessary introductions. "Willow Rosenberg, these lovely people are Harry Sebastian, and Cassandra Black."

"Ooh!" Willow's face lit up. "Witches."

"I'm a wizard actually." Harry smiled widely. "Pleased to meet you."

"Hi, Harry." Willow then turned to Cassandra. "Hi, Cassandra. I know we've only just met but Xander refused to let me near anywhere Luna, so can we get together and talk about magic?"

Cassandra was a little taken aback at Willow's enthusiasm. "Okay..."

Xander put his arm around Willow's shoulders. "You'll have to forgive Willow. She's a practicing Wiccan, and gets overexcited when she's around you magical folk."

Cassandra suddenly realized exactly who Willow was. "I could talk about some simple spells but that's about it, I'm afraid."

“My fearsome reputation goes before me.” Willow sighed. “I promise I won’t try to take over the world.”

Harry laughed. “Well as long as you’ve kicked the habit, I don’t see why Cassandra can’t show you a few spells.”

Willow looked from one to the other. “Are you two dating?”

Both shook their head at once. “No.” Cassandra said.

“Absolutely not.” Harry confirmed Cassandra’s answer. “I’m Cass’ friend as well as her boss.”

“In that case you won’t mind if I take Cassandra and show her to Luna’s room then.” Not giving Harry a change to respond, Willow slipped her arm around Cassandra’s waist, and dragged her away.

Harry turned back to Xander. “Where’s H.J.? I thought together with Willow, he’d be trying to calm you down.”

“He’s helping seat the guests out on the lawn.” Xander nodded in the direction that Harry had originally intended to go in. “Harry, I messed up so badly the last time I tried to get married. What if something does go wrong?”

“Nothing’s going to go wrong.” Harry put his arm around Xander. “Let’s go get a drink. Normally I wouldn’t recommend this for someone who’s about to get married but I’m worried you’ll explode if you don’t get something to calm you down. And perhaps a corn dog.”

Xander was diverted somewhat at the thought of a corn dog. “Perhaps I’m mistaking hunger for nerves.”

“Perhaps you are.” Harry laughed as he led Xander off.

Ninety minutes later a slightly bemused and completely relieved Xander found himself kissing his bride as the Minister announced them husband and wife.

Harry, however, had had a very unpleasant thirty minutes as Thomas had chosen to sit next him as Mione was acting as a Matron of honor. Harry could feel pain prickling throughout his shoulder as he watched the ceremony, Nat sitting quietly on his lap. Eventually though, it was over and Harry stood up. "Nat was very well behaved."

"He's a good boy." Thomas placed a hand on Harry's free arm, unknowingly sending worse pain shooting through Harry. "Are you alright, Harry?"

"Just feeling a little off color." Harry answered truthfully.

"I'll take Nat and his sister back to Theresa." Thomas offered. "You should go and get yourself something for that."

"I'll be alright." Harry passed Nat back to Thomas.

"Thanks for holding him." Thomas walked off until he was out of sight before reaching a designated apparition area and disappearing with the two children.

Harry soon felt better as Thomas left and he watched as the main wedding party had their photos taken. He then joined the rest of group when asked, before waiting until Cassandra wandered over to him. "You look tired, Harry. I wonder why."

Harry tweaked her nose. "It's not for the reason you think it is. I had Thomas right next to me for the whole service."

Cassandra winced. "Do you need anything? I have some painkilling potion in my handbag." Cassandra lifted the small beaded purse up.

"No thanks." Harry held out his arm for Cassandra to take. "So did Luna say who you'd be sitting with for the dinner?"

"She didn't." Cassandra followed everyone else to the boards where the seating arrangements had been laid out. "I didn't realize that Xander and Luna knew so many people."

“Watchers’ Council, family, friends; they soon add up.” Harry groaned. “Of all the people to put me next to.”

Cassandra scowled. “They put you between Buffy Summers and Ginny Weasley?”

“Could have been worse; they could have put me next to one of the stuffed shirts from the Council.” Harry sighed. “Where are you?”

“Between Bill and Charlie Weasley.” Cassandra was just as annoyed. “I suppose I should be grateful it isn’t Harry Potter.”

Harry scanned the tables. “Well Fred and George are definitely here. And joy of joys, Ginny is already sitting down. Even better, I see Blaise Zabini right next to her. Hopefully she’ll ignore me.”

“I’d conveniently forgotten that Luna knows the Weasleys.” Cassandra sighed.

“I’ll walk you to your table.” Harry followed Cassandra over to her designated seat, and greeted Bill. “Hello again, Mr. Weasley.”

“Mr. Sebastian.” ‘Bill’ was slightly cold. “Miss Black.” He then turned his attention to the young woman next to him.

Charlie, however, beamed at Cassandra. “I told Luna to seat me next to someone pretty. I’m Charlie Weasley.”

“Cassandra Black.” Cassandra blushed. “So who’s sitting on the other side of you?”

“That would be the youngest bridesmaid, I believe.” Charlie also smiled widely at Harry. “I’m sorry, I know who you are but I don’t believe we’ve ever had a proper introduction.”

“Harry Sebastian.” Harry shook hands with the stocky young man.

“Charlie Weasley.” Charlie immediately took a liking to the dark-haired man with a firm handshake. “I suppose her father told you to keep an eye on her.”

Sirius had declined to attend as Faith hadn’t been up to making the trip as she was now just over seven months’ pregnant. Harry smiled. “You know how it is. And now that I’ve seen Cassandra safely to her seat, if you’ll both excuse me, I should go take my own.”

After seating Cassandra, Harry watched resentfully as Charlie put his arm around the back of Cassandra’s chair and said something about overbearing parents to her, making her laugh. Harry had to resist the temptation to walk back over there, and tell Charlie that Cassandra was off limits, but as they’d decided to keep their relationship quiet for the time being, he couldn’t. Making his way over to the table he’d been placed at, he nodded politely at Ginny and Blaise, who returned the gesture before sitting down next to an empty space. Harry found himself getting up again a few moments later as a diminutive blond started to pull out a seat. “I’m going to kill Xander.”

“What’s he done now?” Harry couldn’t resist asking as he politely helped the girl sit down.

“You need to ask?” Buffy glanced at the man to the side of her, and lowered her voice. “That guy to my left hates me, and Xander’s obviously trying to set me up with you.” Even though she’d been in London for a while, and Harry had worked for the Council, the two had never met before.

“Well you can rest assured that you’re perfectly safe from me.” Harry held out his hand. “Harry Sebastian.”

“Buffy Summers.” Buffy shook Harry’s hand firmly, a little surprised when he didn’t even flinch but just returned the handshake. “You are one of Luna’s lot, aren’t you?”

“I am.” Harry confirmed. “I used to teach at Luna’s school.”

“A bit young, aren’t you?” Buffy had only estimated Harry to be twenty-five or twenty-six at the outside.

Harry raised an eyebrow. “And you’re a bit small, aren’t you?”

“Point taken.” Buffy ignored the starter on her plate. “So seeing as you obviously no longer teach, what do you do now?”

“I’m Assistant Head at British Auror Division.” Harry watched a startled look cross Buffy’s features.

“I didn’t connect the name but I suppose I should have.” Buffy took a mouthful of wine. “I simply thought that Auror Sebastian was your father.”

“My father is dead.” Harry said. “And before you say anything, it was a long time ago. My brother is H.J.”

“The other best man.” Buffy looked over to where H.J. was seated at the top table.

“Sort of.” Harry smiled. “I don’t think Xander wanted Willow at his bachelor party, hence H.J. stepping in to help.”

Buffy smirked. “Nothing like a woman to cramp your style at a bachelor party.” She glanced at the curly haired woman on the table next to theirs. “That’s his wife isn’t it?”

“She’s called Hermione, and yes she is.” Harry confirmed. “Their daughter was a bridesmaid. Why didn’t you act as one?”

“Too old.” Buffy topped off her glass as well as topping Harry’s up. “So tell me Harry Sebastian, how does someone who barely looks old enough to have finished high school manage to hold the position you do?”

“I could tell you but then I’d have to kill you.” Harry used his usual line.

“I’m harder to kill than I look.” Buffy found that she quite liked Harry.

“So I’ve heard.” Harry was well aware of what Buffy was capable of.
“Mostly from Remus.”

“He’s a really nice guy.” Buffy could see the head of the Council seated on the far side of the lawn.

Harry winced as a hand came to rest on his shoulder. “Thomas, I see you made it back.”

Thomas removed his hand. “I’m sorry to disturb your conversation. I just wanted to see if you felt any better.”

“Much thanks.” Harry stood up. “Sorry, I’ve forgotten my manners. Buffy Summers, Thomas Seville.”

Buffy shook hands with Thomas. “Hi.”

“Ms Summers. Harry. I’ll leave you two to your conversation.” Thomas headed off to join Mione.

Buffy watched him go. “Now why couldn’t Xander have put me next to him?”

“Thanks.” Harry said a little sarcastically.

Buffy grinned. “You’ve already said I’m perfectly safe from you, so I’m free to weigh up my options.”

Harry had to smile. “Well I’m afraid he’s taken already. I thought you’d have recognized the name.”

Buffy’s mouth fell open. “He’s that Thomas Seville?”

“Yep.” Harry laughed. “And he’s married to a friend of mine.”

“I didn’t realize.” Buffy quickly finished off her glass of wine again. “So are you single?”

“Not exactly.” Harry said cryptically.

“Are you engaged or married?” Buffy held up her glass so that Harry could refill it.

“No.” Harry said simply. “I’m seeing someone but it’s complicated.”

“Try dating a guy that’s more than two hundred years older than you.” Buffy picked up an asparagus stick and bit into it. “Now that’s complicated.”

“Okay, you win.” Harry glanced behind him as he felt waves of dislike emanating from both Ginny and Blaise. Deciding he’d already had enough, he made an excuse. “I’m really not enjoying this food. Will you excuse me?”

“You’re not leaving me here with this lot.” Buffy picked up her handbag and followed Harry. “You don’t like the couple who were behind you, do you?”

“Not in the slightest.” Harry admitted. “And I hate weddings.”

“Me too.” Buffy waited until they were in an open space before asking a humdinger of a question. “So when were you planning to tell me that you’re a werewolf?”

Harry stopped walking in surprise. “How did you know?”

“The strong handshake, and I can just tell.” Buffy didn’t really know how she knew. “So getting back to your love life, Mr. Complicated, are you going to tell me who you’re seeing?”

“Someone I shouldn’t be.” Harry avoided telling her the truth as they began walking again.

"A little like me then." Buffy grinned conspiratorially.

"I thought you were free to weigh up your options." Harry challenged.

"My relationship isn't exactly what I'd call serious." Buffy responded.

"In that case, are you going to tell me who you're seeing?" Harry asked.

"If you tell me who you're seeing first." Buffy bargained with Harry.

"Cassandra Black." Harry told her.

"Remus Lupin." Buffy could see that she'd shocked Harry.

"How long?" Harry was totally stunned.

"About three months on and off." Buffy let Harry open the door to the bar for her.

Harry sat down at a table. "Can I buy you a drink?"

"A glass of white wine." Buffy told him. "Actually as I've got no intention of going back to the table you may as well order a bottle. We can go Dutch."

"I'll buy the bottle, but we can share it." Harry did as Buffy requested before leaning back against his chair. "So what's your story?"

"One girl... you know the bump. To sum it up, I fell in love, died, fell in love again, saved the world, fell in love, saved the world yet again, boyfriend died then came back as a ghost, got new boyfriend who was a half demon who ditched me for a younger model." Buffy summed things up after the bump comment in one very abbreviated but at the same time long sentence.

"So how did you and Remus get together?" Harry was more than interested in finding out.

“I was having problems dealing with what had happened with Carlos, my former boyfriend, and I think Remus was fed up with having to replace everything I kept breaking. I also think he was worried that I'd end up breaking something more serious than a table or chair, so he came over to San Francisco to talk to me.” Buffy played with her hair. “One thing led to another, and a few weeks later we ended up in bed together.”

“And you're not serious about each other?” Harry glanced up as the waitress brought their wine over, and Harry sampled it. “That's fine, thank you.”

Buffy shook her head. “Every love affair I have I mess up, so this one's purely a relationship of convenience. Besides, he's in love with someone else.”

“Anyone I know?” Harry smiled up at the waitress as he signed the check for the wine.

“Someone he works with.” Buffy absently answered as she took a sip of her wine, before remembering that Remus had actually told her that Sirius' assistant had once worked for the Council.

Harry thought about the various women he'd known at the Council, before groaning slightly. “Please tell me that it's not Mione.”

“I can't tell you who is it.” Buffy realized that she'd said too much as Harry was obviously more au fait with who worked at the Council than she thought.

“You've got to do better than to lie to a werewolf.” Harry said wryly, knowing that he'd guessed correctly as guilt flooded through Buffy. “And as I've already said, she's married.”

Buffy's mouth fell open as she made the connection. “Mione Seville. I didn't click. She the friend who's married to the hottie, isn't she?”

“She is.” Harry informed her. “Poor Remus.”

Buffy decided she'd better change the subject. "So how serious is it with you and Cassandra?"

Harry poured himself a glass of wine. "We've only been seeing each other for just over two weeks."

"So I can safely assume that there are no wedding bells on the horizon." Buffy deduced.

"Absolutely not." Harry shook his head. "And besides I've been married twice already."

"You are older than you look." Buffy remarked in surprise. "So what went wrong?"

"My first wife died." Harry couldn't tell her that it was Mione. "And I left my second wife as I never really loved her in the way she deserved to be." Harry laughed wryly. "This is beginning to get a little heavy."

"Hey, you could have dated two vampires like me..." Buffy didn't finish what she'd intended to say, as she looked behind Harry. "I think you're being followed."

Harry looked round to find an unhappy looking Cassandra coming his way. Harry got up and went and put his arm around her. "Cass, this is Buffy Summers. Buffy, this is Cassandra Black."

Cassandra politely shook hands. "Was there something wrong with where you were sitting?"

"Your boyfriend didn't like the company." Buffy let Cassandra know that she aware that they were dating. "Neither did I, so I used him as an excuse to escape. I take it you did the same."

"No, I was just going to fetch a wrap. It's a little chilly out." Cassandra lied; she'd been beside herself when she'd spotted Harry and Buffy walking off together, seemingly wrapped up in each other.

“I’ll get it for you.” Not wanting to embarrass Cassandra by calling her out on her lie, Harry walked off to get the wrap.

Buffy smiled at Cassandra. “Harry told me that you’ve been seeing each for a couple of weeks.”

“I’m surprised he told you.” Cassandra relaxed a little. “We haven’t even told our friends we’re seeing each other as Dad would have a fit if he knew.”

“Sometimes it’s easier to talk to a stranger.” Buffy decided to be frank with Cassandra. “Look Cassandra, I’m not interested in Harry, just in case you were worried. He warned me off the minute I sat down, and I’m already sort of seeing someone.”

Cassandra felt relief flood through her. “Thank you for telling me.”

“You’re welcome.” Buffy pointed to Harry’s glass. “Help yourself.”

“I’d better not.” Cassandra refused the offer. After her experience at the Minstrel, she now tried to limit herself to drinking only at home.

“So how are you getting along with Faith?” Buffy enquired after her friend, and Cassandra’s stepmother.

“She took some getting used to but going through a near death experience with someone has a tendency to bring you closer together.” Cassandra had grown to like her stepmother. “I was with her when Siri was born.”

“She does take a little getting used to.” Buffy remarked as she spotted Harry coming back. “Here comes your wrap.”

Harry handed it over. “You’re only here for two days, Cass. There’s enough in that trunk to last you a month.”

Cassandra shrugged. “I didn’t know what I’d need so I planned for every eventuality.”

Harry then noticed yet more people coming their way. "I spy your dinner partner, Cass and one extra."

Charlie, who was chatting to the girl by his side, walked into the bar. "I was getting worried, Cassandra."

"Sorry, Charlie." Cassandra picked up her wrap. "It took a little longer than I thought."

"Hi Uncle Harry." Cammie hugged Harry. "Charlie said I could come and look for Cassandra with him."

Harry could see that Cammie had already taken to Charlie. "Charlie Weasley, Cammie Sebastian, this is Buffy Summers."

Cammie's mouth fell open. "You're the Slayer."

Buffy smiled at the young girl. "I'm just a slayer now."

"That's not what my history teacher said." Cammie grinned. "Wait until I tell my friends who I met."

Over Cammie's shoulder, Harry could see a concerned H.J. heading his way. "Did you remember to tell your Dad where you were going?"

Cammie gulped. "I forgot."

H.J. marched into the bar. "Camellia Sebastian, the next time you disappear, please be so good as to tell someone where you're going."

Charlie stood up. "I'm sorry. It's my fault. I said she could come with me to look for Cassandra."

"Cammie knows better." H.J. glared at his daughter. "You're to return to the table, and stay there."

"I'll walk back with her." Cassandra put her arm through Cammie's.

Cammie gratefully smiled at Cassandra as they left together. "I'll race you back."

Harry hid a smile as the two ran off, Cammie in front.

Sitting down, H.J. let out a deep sigh. "I'm sorry but ever since she was bitten by a snake, when she's not at home or in school, I'm on edge every time she's out of my sight. Not that I'm worried about snakes here, unlike my daughter who is, but there are plenty of other things I do worry about."

Charlie apologized again. "It's my fault. I shouldn't have simply presumed that she was okay to come with me especially as you have no idea who I am."

"You're Charlie Weasley." H.J. smiled and held out his hand. "I'm H.J. Sebastian. I teach at Hogwarts."

Charlie beamed his friendly smile. "You're the flying instructor, aren't you?"

"Yes, I..." H.J.'s voice trailed off as he heard Cammie scream. Climbing to his feet, H.J. turned to see eight white masked men standing in front of Cammie and Cassandra right at the end of the pathway before it turned to go back towards the area where the wedding was being held. "Cammie."

On the pathway, Cassandra pulled out her wand, pushing Cammie behind her. "Cammie, stay behind me."

Cammie held onto Cassandra's dress. "Cassandra, I'm scared."

At Cammie's scream, their chairs flying to the floor as they got up, Harry and Buffy had both shot out of the bar, almost neck and neck as they raced towards Cammie and Cassandra. Harry had withdrawn both wands as he ran, and was firing off spells towards the men, causing the area to become airless; something one of the Death Eaters counteracted almost immediately. As he was still some

distance away, Harry didn't dare use anything too dangerous as he was afraid of hurting the two girls.

H.J. swore as he ran behind them, unable to keep up and unable to apparate as this was an area that had been deemed off limits to apparition and portkeying as it was predominantly Muggle. Being fairly well built, Charlie was even slower.

On the other side of the clearing, Remus, Thomas and Mione broke through the bushes, and as they did so, several of the Death Eaters closest to them automatically swung their wands around and took aim. Remus just avoided a Reducto spell, hitting the floor but a spell hit Mione, blasting through the shield she had only just began to erect. Mione crumpled unconscious to the ground; Remus rolling over to catch her before she hit it.

Seeing Remus grab Mione, Thomas returned fire. "Propius Dolens Nex".

The Death Eater it hit screamed as pain ripped through him.

As the Death Eater began screaming, Cassandra heard a boom and she knew that the wards had been brought down. Not having much choice except to ignore it, she continued to take aim at the Death Eaters. "Reducto."

Cassandra's efforts came to an abrupt end as an object was thrown at her, causing her to vanish and taking Cammie with her. The Death Eater with a silver snake on his mask snapped at the others. He then vanished. Remembering their orders to dispatch anyone who had gotten in their way, and if possible acquire Harry, the remaining six turned to face Harry and the others.

Seeing his daughter vanish, H.J.'s face contorted with anger and he threw a spell which hurtled past Buffy and Harry, who had by now had almost reached the scene. The killing curse hit the nearest Death Eater and he flew through the air. Thomas decided that Harry, H.J. and Charlie could deal with the remaining Death Eaters, and stopped firing to erect a shield to protect Mione from any further curses, thus

freeing Remus up from protecting Mione bodily. Harry easily dodged a small ball that was thrown at him, guessing it was a portkey.

H.J. sent yet another spell at the six remaining Death Eaters, all six of whom were now focused on him, Harry and Buffy; Charlie lagging quite a way behind. Thomas sucked in his breath at the sound of the spell that he'd invented, and had only used twice in his life; the first time to kill his former girlfriend's lover and the second time on the boy who'd claimed to be an alternate Harry Potter. Under Harry's constant bombardment, one of the Death Eater's shields failed, and the spell that Thomas had recognized hit the hapless Death Eater firmly in the face.

Now in the thick of things, Buffy dodged a green spell she knew wouldn't be good if it hit her before launching herself at a Death Eater, who went down under the force of her kick. Harry meanwhile used the threefold spell that he favored to blow a hole through the shoulder through one of the other Death Eaters.

As Thomas, Remus and Charlie joined H.J. in attacking the remaining Death Eaters, Harry stopped firing so that he could erect a new ward to stop apparition. However, moments before he finished conjuring it, four cream and brown clad Aurors popped in existence beside the group, their wands out. "Drop your wands."

At the sight of the Aurors, five of the now seriously injured Death Eaters vanished, one by grabbing the ball that had missed Harry, just as Harry's ward rippled into existence, leaving behind a body and the one Death Eater Thomas had hit first. Harry swore loudly. "Fuck it." He turned on the Aurors, who he knew had been sent out in response to the magical activity in a very public Muggle area. "I'm Harry Sebastian, British Auror Division."

"Sir, put down your wand, so that we can ascertain that you are who you say you are." The lead Auror instructed Harry. "We can deal with the injured once you've all dropped your weapons."

Around Harry, everyone else was surrendering their wands. Thomas just ignored the Aurors, and took Mione from Remus, who also handed over his wand. "Get these wards down now, Harry."

Harry knew what the spell that had hit her was doing to Mione, and he therefore dropped to the ground, collapsing his ward at the same time. Thomas and Mione vanished. Harry then rolled over just as several stunning spells hit the spot he'd been lying in. More pops sounded, and Harry suddenly found himself surrounded by even more brown and cream clad Aurors. The Auror, who'd just missed Harry, moved closer. "Now hand over your wands, Sir."

Harry dropped the wands and held up his hands. "My badge is in my inside pocket. You won't be able to summon it though."

Two of the Aurors kept their wands trained on Harry, while the lead Auror told Harry what he wanted him to do. "Get up slowly, take off the jacket, and then use the thumb and first finger of your left hand to reach inside and take the badge out. Then drop the jacket to the ground."

Harry did as he was instructed, making sure he didn't make any sudden moves. He then dropped the jacket and opened up the badge before handing it over.

The Auror tapped it with his wand, and read out loud the information it contained. "Harry Sebastian, Assistant Head, British Auror Division." He handed it back to Harry. "I'm sorry, Sir, but I had to check."

Harry picked up his jacket. "That's quite alright, Auror. You can give them their wands back. They're with me."

"I need to tell Hermione." H.J. was white. "Let her know what's happened."

Charlie put an arm around H.J.'s shoulders. "I'll go with you."

The head of the group nodded towards his men who did as Harry had instructed. "What can we do, Sir?"

Harry quickly gave out instructions. "Obviously as this is a Muggle area, we need several Obliviation teams. And I want the man screaming on the floor taken into custody. He's going to die but get

whatever you can out of him.” Harry glanced over at the Death Eater that H.J. had killed. “I’ll sign off on any paperwork for both the dead man and the potentially dead one as no charges are to be brought against anyone here for use of illegal curses. I also need an international floo to contact Commander Black.”

“Yes, Sir.” Auror Mapp was glad when the screaming man was removed. “Marley here will show you where it is.”

“This is for you, Sir.” Jennifer Marley held out a portkey, not realizing that Harry already knew. “You can contact him through our Los Angeles branch.”

Buffy stood next to Harry. “I’m coming with you.”

“So am I.” Remus also moved to stand by Harry.

“I’m sorry, but you can’t.” Jennifer refused.

“Yes, they can.” Harry grabbed both Buffy’s and Remus’ hands, and ignoring the portkey, apparated them all to USAD, L.A.

The pair followed Harry through USAD’s corridors until he reached a communication area. Buffy looked around with interest. “You seem to know this place well.”

“I’ve been here before.” Harry said tersely before throwing international floo powder into the fireplace. “Sirius Black, 12 Grimmauld Place, London, England.”

As it was getting late in England, Sirius had been reading in bed, and took some time to respond to Harry’s hail. “Harry, what’s…”

“Cassandra and Cammie have been taken, Sirius.” Harry said quickly. “I need you over here. I’m in USAD, L.A.”

Sirius paled. “I’ll tell Faith, and I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

Five minutes later a white faced and stern looking Sirius portkeyed into USAD. "What happened, Harry?"

Harry explained. "We were just too far away. Remus, Thomas and Mione were closer; I think Cammie's ring must have alerted Thomas to the danger she was in."

Remus confirmed Harry's suspicions. "I think it did as I heard him tell Mione that Cammie needed him, and that Mione should stay behind but she refused. I didn't hear Cammie scream but knew something was wrong for Thomas to say what he did, and so I followed them."

"If you didn't hear Cammie scream, the Death Eaters must have warded the wedding area, and didn't expect resistance from the Muggle side." Harry deduced before continuing with his report. "There were definitely eight Death Eaters in plain view but I suspect there must have been another one hidden somewhere who brought down the anti-apparition and portkey wards. Of the eight I could see, one left as soon as Cammie and Cass vanished, two are dead or potentially that way and we badly injured the remaining five. Unfortunately they got away before I could finish erecting a ward. Of the two major casualties I mentioned, H.J. used the killing curse one of them, and Thomas hit the other one, who's going to die as I know there's no counter to the curse he used."

"I take it you want me to second your decision not to press charges against either Thomas or H.J.?" Sirius knew Harry well enough to predict how his number one had acted.

"I do." Harry then finished up. "Apart from Cass and Cammie, we had one injury on our side. Mione was hit by the Lentus curse. Thomas has already left with her."

"So why is Miss Summers here?" Sirius had recognized the slayer immediately, having met her several times. The two of them, however, had never hit it off. "I would have thought you could leave your girlfriend at the wedding."

Harry hid his annoyance at Sirius' supposition but didn't disabuse Sirius of his incorrect notion, and neither did Remus nor Buffy. "She was with me when the attack happened, and I didn't want to leave her unprotected."

"Fair enough." Sirius marched towards the apparition point. "Let's get out there."

A girl came running up. "Auror Sebastian. This was just delivered for you."

Harry impatiently took the communiqué, read it and passed it to Sirius. "It seems that he knew I'd be here."

"You do know it's a trap don't you?" Sirius held onto the note. "I'll go."

Harry refused. "He's asked for me by name."

Sirius overruled Harry. "Cassie's my daughter and I'm going."

"Sirius, Dominus might kill her if you go instead." Harry knew too well how Voldemort operated. "I've got to go."

Sirius still tried to argue. "Harry, I can't let you..."

Harry took a deep breath. "Permission to speak freely, Sir."

"Granted." Sirius agreed reluctantly.

"Sirius, I know you're her father, and you want to protect her but you'll end up killing her if you go." Harry kept his tone deferential but firm. "And this is not just Cass we're dealing with. He's got Cammie as well."

"I know that but I can't just sit back and let you die for my daughter." Sirius knew that whoever went wouldn't be coming back.

Harry disagreed. "You're going to have to."

Despite everything Sirius had said to Harry about objectivity, it was forgotten in the face of Sirius' daughter's disappearance. "I'm ordering you to..."

Sirius didn't get any further as Harry lashed out with his fist. Sirius started to crumple to the ground, only for Remus to catch him before he hit it. "You do know that Sirius is going to be mightily pissed with you about this, don't you?"

"As I don't expect I'll be back, I'm not going to have to worry about Sirius' feelings." Harry remarked shortly as he picked up the note that Sirius had dropped as he fell.

"If you know it's a trap, then why are you going?" Buffy thought Harry was mad.

"Because I know that if I don't, then Cass and Cammie don't stand a chance of being released." Harry snapped.

"Do you really expect a man who's going to kill you to release them just because you turned up?" Buffy asked incredulously as she followed Harry and Remus down to the medical bay.

"They're just the bait." Harry pushed open the doors. "I'm the one who pissed him off when I refused to join him."

"They're that important to you?" Buffy stood aside as a healer came over.

"Yes. Cammie's my niece, and Cass is the most important person in my life." Harry watched Remus lower Sirius onto a bed. "I've got to go. The portkey is due to go off in a few minutes and this area is warded." Harry hurried off, Remus following behind him.

When Harry reached the portkey and apparition point, he turned to Remus. "Tell Sirius I'll do my best to ensure that both girls are released."

Remus held out his hand, quickly shaking Harry's. "Good luck."

"I think whatever luck I had has just run out." With that Harry let go of Remus' hand, and a few moments later the portkey kicked in, and Harry disappeared.

In the medical bay Sirius groaned, and sat up. "What happened?"

Buffy took great delight in telling him, knowing that Sirius didn't really like her. "Harry hit you and he's gone off to try and rescue the girls."

"Fuck." Sirius hit the bed, and let out a yelp as he bruised his knuckles on the hidden metal bar under the blanket at the side of the bed.

"So what can I do to help?" Buffy asked in a cheerfully annoying sort of voice that she knew would irritate Sirius.

"You can shut up and come with me." Sirius brushed off the healer and swayed as he got to his feet.

"Actually..." Buffy slid her arm around Sirius' waist as he teetered sideways. "...I think you'll be coming with me."

"Whatever." Sirius snapped. "Let's just go."

The healer could do nothing as the pair left the medical bay in search of Remus.

Next Chapter: Things go very badly for Harry and Cassandra.

Chapter 39: Pain and Punishment

WARNING: This chapter isn't particularly pleasant as it contains torture and slightly disturbing mental pictures. I will be referring to Thomas as 'Dominus' as Harry, Cammie, and Cassandra have no idea who he really is.

23rd December 2004 - 8p.m. - New York

After dropping Buffy back at the hotel, and telling Orion what had happened, Sirius and Remus left Sirius' protesting son behind, and headed for USAD, New York.

Sirius knew that the old saying 'bad news travel fast' must be right, as when he arrived, he found Michaela was waiting for them. Michaela nodded politely at Remus who nodded back. "Remus." She then turned to Sirius. "I'm sorry, Sirius."

"Thanks, Michaela." Sirius was quite brusque, not trusting himself to break down if he wasn't. "Have you heard anything?"

"Not a thing, but I can keep you posted as I've got someone at both St. Mungo's and BritAD." Michaela had sent people over to the UK as soon as she'd heard what had happened. "To be honest, I thought you would have gone back there yourself."

"As I've got no idea where they are, I'm hedging my bets and staying in between California and the UK." After discussing it with Remus, who'd stepped in to replace Harry as Sirius' sounding board, Sirius had decided it would be his best option. "Cammie's parents are returning to the UK, as are most of our friends, including the couple whose wedding they were all attending."

Sirius became aware of someone hovering behind him. Turning around he found a woman he recognized from Harry's memories was standing there. "Auror Jenkins, is there something you need?"

Tabitha's eyes were red rimmed. "I know both Auror Sebastian and Auror Black, and I just wanted to see if there was anything I could do to help, Sir."

Michaela began to answer. "I don't think so..."

"Actually there is." Sirius interrupted her. "I need someone to act as a liaison. If you can spare Auror Jenkins, I'd appreciate it."

Michaela nodded. "She's at your disposal, Sirius. I've also allocated you office 22B."

"Then that's where we'll be." Sirius turned to Tabitha. "Come with us."

Tabitha trotted behind Sirius and Remus into the office Michaela had allocated. "What do you need me to do, Sir?"

Sirius barked out what he needed. "I need you to check in with Auror Harley in L.A., and see if anything has happened there since I left. Also please ask her to check the regional wizarding hospitals in that half of the country; I also need Muggle hospitals monitored just in case. Afterwards please check any other wizarding hospitals between here and where L.A.'s authority ends. I'll be checking in constantly with the contacts that Chief Bradford has sent to the UK."

Tabitha was ahead out of Sirius, and pulled out a sheet of paper. "I've already checked St. Mungo's and here on the Eastern seaboard, the Mid-West, Florida and the South. No-one's heard anything, but I'll expand my search to include Muggle hospitals, and keep checking regularly." Tabitha knew that it was an almost impossible task but she was determined to do whatever she could, and had every intention of roping in her friends to help.

Sirius nodded. "Thank you."

Tabitha disappeared, and Sirius closed the door before leaning against it, dizziness overcoming him. Remus ran his wand over Sirius.

"When he hit you, I think Harry might have fractured your skull, Sirius. I also think you have a concussion."

"Heal me then; don't just bloody well tell me about it." Sirius snarled at his friend before immediately apologizing. "Sorry, Remus."

"Better you take it out on me than someone else." Remus remarked, not in the slightest bit bothered by Sirius' outburst.

"I can't stand this, Remus." Sirius began pacing the floor, wavering as he walked. "Cassie's out there somewhere and I can't do a fucking thing to help her."

"You're just going to have to trust Harry." Remus grabbed Sirius as he wobbled.

"I do trust Harry." Sirius leant against Remus as he fought the wave of dizziness that again threatened to overcome him. "It's that bastard who's taken her I don't trust."

"Sirius, I understand that." Remus opened the door as he supported his friend. "But right now as we can't do anything about it, I think we should see a healer."

Sirius didn't respond but simply let Remus lead him up the corridor towards the medical bay and a cure for what Harry had done to him.

24th December 2004 – 2.a.m. - England

Harry turned his head to look to see who was coming in as the door opened. "Dominus."

The gold masked man stepped into the room. "Harry Sebastian. I'm so glad you decided to accept my invitation."

"I really had little choice. As you can see your men have already made me feel more than welcome." Harry's chest, back and face were bruised and bloody from the torture the Death Eaters had

already inflicted on him. "But you and they can do what you want to me as you're getting nothing from me."

"You're so very wrong." Dominus sat down on the table that was placed opposite Harry. "You see, Harry, I have the upper hand; so if you co-operate with me then I'll consider going easy on you."

"Fuck you." Harry unconsciously mimicked the same response Sirius had given to Dominus at the Ministry.

"Bad language will get you nowhere." Dominus turned his wand on Harry. "Crucio."

Harry almost bit through his lip in an effort not to scream but gave up after his whole world became pain and nothing else.

Dominus removed the spell. "I suggest you show a little respect, Harry."

Harry spat out blood at Dominus, just missing him. "Fuck you."

Dominus shook his head. "You are a tenacious little bugger, aren't you? Aduro Infra Corium."

Harry couldn't escape the intense burning sensation that emanated from beneath his skin, and he screamed and screamed until Dominus dropped the spell.

Dominus tapped his wand against his leg. "Do you have anything else you want to say, Harry?"

This time, Harry said nothing as sweat poured off him, and he struggled to get his breath back. Dominus smiled. "That's much better. Now tell me, Harry, would you like to see your niece?"

"Yes." Harry's throat hurt where he'd been screaming, and his voice sounded rusty to his ears.

Dominus vanished, returning moments later with Cammie, who'd obviously been crying. "Uncle Harry!"

Dominus let Cammie go, and the young girl rushed forward and wrapped her arms around Harry's bare waist, making him hiss as she irritated his injuries. "Are you alright, Cammie?"

Cammie kept her face buried in Harry's chest, ignoring the blood she was getting on herself. "Yes."

"And she'll continue to be that way if you co-operate." Dominus pulled Cammie away, who began struggling to get back to Harry.

"Let go of me." Frightened and panicking, Cammie kicked out, catching Dominus sharply on his shin, forcing him to let go of her.

Harry sucked in his breath as Dominus raised his wand. "Not her."

Dominus reigned in his temper. "Cammie, I want an apology or your Uncle Harry is going to pay the price for what you just did."

Her arms once again wrapped around Harry, Cammie did as he asked. "I'm very sorry."

"Thank you." Dominus beckoned. "Now come here. It's time for you to go."

Cammie shook her head. "No."

Dominus raised his wand again, so Harry intervened. "Cammie, do as he says. I promise you'll be alright."

"I don't want to leave you." Cammie began to sob and clung even tighter to Harry.

"I need you to be brave for me, Cammie." Harry wished he could comfort his niece with more than mere words but his arms were held firmly in place by the chains that hung from the ceiling. "Go with him."

You'll be back with your parents before you know it."

Cammie looked up at Harry, tears running down her cheeks. "What about you?"

"I'll be fine." Harry lied. "Please, Cammie, do as I ask."

Reluctantly Cammie let go of Harry and forced herself to move towards the gold masked man, before turning to face Harry again. "Do I have to go, Uncle Harry?"

"I'm sorry, sweetheart, but you do." Harry smiled encouragingly at his niece. "Don't forget that I love you."

"I love you too, Uncle Harry." Cammie shot back across the room and hugged Harry tightly, before letting him go and moving back across to where Dominus was standing.

Dominus put his hand on her shoulder. "I'll return shortly, Harry."

This time, instead of a cell, Cammie found herself in a large, luxuriously decorated sitting room, and despite her fears asked a question. "Where is this?"

Dominus let go of her. "It's your room for the time being. As your Uncle Harry is co-operating, I've decided that you might be more comfortable in here. There's a bathroom through that door so that you can wash off that blood. Do not attempt to leave via that door." Dominus pointed to yet another door. "If you do, I can't guarantee your safety. The last door leads to a bedroom. There's food and water on the tray over there. If things go as I expect them to, the next time we meet I'll be releasing you."

By now Cammie had backed up against the wall. "What about Uncle Harry?"

"Don't worry about Harry." Dominus didn't answer Cammie's question directly.

Cammie wasn't stupid. "You're going to hurt him, aren't you?"

"Yes." Dominus responded bluntly. "But Harry already knows that."

"Please don't." Cammie begged. "I'll behave."

"I'm sorry, Cammie but Harry knew what would happen to him if he came after you and Cassandra." Dominus apologized to the young girl.

"It's my fault then." Cammie started to cry again. "Please don't hurt Uncle Harry because of me."

"It's not your fault, Cammie." Dominus stepped forward and laid a hand on Cammie's shoulder. He could see as well as feel the young girl shivering like a frightened puppy. "You weren't actually supposed to be here; just Cassandra and Harry were."

"But why do you want Uncle Harry and Cassandra?" Cammie wanted to pull free but was too afraid of what Dominus would do to both her and Harry if she did.

"Because Harry knows where something that I need is, and using Cassandra as leverage is the only way he'll tell me." Dominus didn't lie to the young girl. "And because he's going to be joining me."

Cammie shook her head vigorously. "Uncle Harry would never do that."

"When he doesn't have a choice he will." Dominus stroked Cammie's cheek. "Now I'd like your wand and the vial I know you've got in your pocket that my men stupidly didn't take off you earlier." Thomas had felt the container and the wand when she'd been struggling against him.

Cammie's hand flew to her hidden pocket. "It's only anti-venom."

"So you want to keep it?" Dominus knew how terrified Cammie was of snakes now that she'd been bitten.

"Please." Cammie didn't want to give it up. "And can I please keep my wand? I promise not to use it unless it's an emergency." Cammie desperately wanted the security of the wand that was strapped to her arm, and rendered invisible by the Auror's holster that Harry had given her for her birthday, even though she knew that it likely wouldn't do her any good against the man in front of her.

Dominus knew that she couldn't get out of the room despite what he'd told her about leaving. And knowing Cammie as well as he did, he was also aware that she was unlikely to be able to do much damage with her wand even if she hit him with a killing curse. "Very well. Now don't forget that I'll be back to let you go."

As Dominus left, Cammie sank to the floor before quietly whispering four words. "I don't believe you."

Once back in Harry's cell, Dominus used the Cruciatus curse on Harry again, only dropping it when Harry was almost unconscious. "You didn't really think I'd let Cammie's actions go unrewarded, did you?"

Harry was barely able to shake his head.

"Now I think it's time to bring our third player into the equation." With that Dominus left the room.

It was almost half an hour later when Cassandra was floated into the room. Harry paled at the sight of his girlfriend who was clad in only her underwear. Harry could see that Cassandra's lip was split and her right eye and both cheeks were swollen where she'd obviously been hit, and there was also a cut running down the side of her left cheek. Bruising and cuts also marred her neck, upper arms, wrists, ankles and stomach, and her underwear was coated with blood. As she was floated past him, Harry could also see what he knew were lashes from a whip on her back. Not caring what Dominus would do to him, Harry struggled hard against his chains. "You fucking bastard. I swear I'm going to kill you for this."

Dominus ignored Harry as, with his second wand, he transfigured the table in the far corner of the room into a couch, and lowered Cassandra onto it. He then addressed Harry's comments. "I haven't touched her."

"Don't lie to me." Harry snarled as he fought to keep his temper.

Dominus swung round angrily to face Harry. "I'm not. If I'd done it, I'd be happy to tell you so." Dominus turned back to place a hand on Cassandra's shoulder forcing her back against the rough fabric of the sofa, making her cry out in pain. "That was just for starters. So, Harry, from now on, if you so much as breathe in a way I don't like, she's going to pay for it. Do you understand?"

Harry instantly nodded. "Yes."

Dominus addressed Cassandra. "And as a little added incentive, would you like to tell Harry exactly what you've just been told?"

Cassandra bit her lip as the gashes on her back were painfully irritated, and shook her head. "No."

Dominus pushed Cassandra harder into the sofa making her cry out once more. "It looks as though I'll have to do it then. Harry, Cassandra here has suffered some very nasty curses. Another one could kill her. Actually sneezing might kill her."

Harry thought his heart was going to stop at the news. "Cass? Is he telling the truth?"

Cassandra reluctantly nodded. "Yes."

Harry swallowed his pride and pleaded on Cassandra's behalf, even though he knew as he did it, it would do no good. "Please, Dominus, she needs medical treatment so I'm begging you to let her go."

"I think not." Dominus stroked Cassandra's cut cheek. "She's such a pretty thing, isn't she? Or she would be without her facial injuries."

Cassandra felt nauseated, and weakly tried to pull free of his touch. "Get your hands off me."

Dominus laughed. "Despite your injuries, you're still a feisty little thing, aren't you? But you should know this before you mouth off at me again. In the same way that you'll be suffering for everything Harry does wrong, for everything you do wrong, he'll suffer. Do you understand?"

Cassandra glanced over at Harry and acknowledged that she did. "Yes."

Dominus turned to Harry. "Before we get to what I'm really after, I want to know about your brother."

"What has H.J. got to do with this?" Harry wondered what Dominus wanted with the young man.

"I know he's not exactly what he seems." Dominus persisted. "So let's try that again. Tell me everything you know about him."

"I don't know anything about him that would interest you." Harry tried to think of what Dominus would want to know, not realizing that Dominus had worked out that H.J. was from the same world he'd come from.

"Wrong answer." Dominus turned his wand on Cassandra.

"He's just a school teacher for pity's sake." Harry cried out. "Please I don't know what else I can tell you."

"As I said; wrong answer." Dominus carried out his promise. "Verbero Pectus Singulus."

Cassandra screamed as a single lash mark appeared across her breasts.

Harry felt totally helpless to help Cassandra. "Please stop hurting her. I don't know what you want to know about H.J."

“Tell me about Altus instead then.” Dominus demanded.

“He’s an Unspeakable.” Harry blurted out.

“An Unspeakable who I believe is your brother.” Knowing that his world's Lily Black had invented the threefold spell, and armed with what Michaela had told him about Altus, Dominus incorrectly deduced that H.J. was the Unspeakable he’d fought at the Ministry.

“If you know, then why are you asking me?” Harry tried to keep his voice free of any hint of incivility.

It didn’t work. “I warned you to watch your mouth.”

Cassandra braced herself for another lash but none came. Instead Dominus changed tactics. “Obviously Harry doesn’t care what I do to you. So tell me, Cassandra. Do you have any idea what a treat you’re going to be in for if Harry continues to hinder me and refuses to answer my questions?”

Harry knew exactly what Dominus would do to his girlfriend having borne witness to similar displays before. “Please don’t do this to her.”

Dominus ignored Harry and ran two well manicured fingers along the edge of the yellow lace of Cassandra’s strapless bra where it framed her breasts. “Tell me, Cassandra, have you ever slept with a man before?”

Harry felt his blood run cold, and Cassandra caught Harry’s horrified look, and answered without thinking about the consequences. “That’s none of your business.”

“Crucio.” Dominus turned his wand on Harry making him scream and strain against the chains. “Now Cassandra, let’s try again.”

Cassandra hung her head. “Yes.”

Dominus released the spell and Harry collapsed limply in his chains. "Now I'm fairly certain that Harry there would never beg for himself. But for you it seems he's quite willing to debase himself. So tell, Cassandra, was it Harry?"

"No, it was someone in the apartment block where I live." Cassandra whispered as she lied, not wanting to give Dominus even more ammunition to use against Harry. "Harry's just a friend."

"But I have the feeling he'd like to be more." Dominus again ran several fingers over Cassandra's breast just above her bra, and turned to face Harry. "I'd bet you'd like to know what this feels like, wouldn't you, Harry?"

"Yes." Harry responded without hesitation with what he knew Dominus wanted to hear.

"I can't say I blame you. She has the softest skin." Dominus shifted his hand away from Cassandra's breast to rest on her shoulder. "So getting back to Altus, Harry. Is he H.J.?" Dominus wanted to know for certain.

Harry wasn't willing to confirm or deny it, and found a loophole that he hoped Dominus would accept. "He might be. As the head of Auror Division, only Sirius knows for sure who each of the Unspeakables are."

Dominus knew that Harry was telling the truth about only Sirius knowing in this world, as Dumbledore had confirmed that much to him before their meeting had been interrupted by Bellatrix Delaney, and all hell had broken loose. "That wasn't so difficult now, was it?" Dominus kept his hand on Cassandra's shoulder. "Now tell me. Do you know where he's really from? And don't say California."

Harry knew then that Dominus knew exactly who H.J. was, and why he was so interested in him. "Yes, I do."

"More importantly, are you from the same place?" Dominus continued his line of questioning.

“No.” Harry lied yet again.

Dominus lifted his hand from Cassandra’s shoulder before running it across her stomach, making her shudder from both pain and revulsion. “So if you’re not from the same place, then tell me Harry, how did you get to be involved in this?”

“As my father was a former member of BritAD, Sirius knew my family well, and I’ve been working on and off in a freelance position for the Division ever since I was still at school.” Harry lied quickly, and he hoped convincingly, in the hope that Dominus would leave Cassandra alone. “Sirius therefore asked if I’d let H.J. masquerade as my brother. And as I was moving to the UK with my girlfriend at the time so that she could attend Hogwarts, I agreed. I then spent some time with H.J. filling him in on my background before we moved over here.”

Dominus was satisfied as Harry’s words more or less confirmed what Mione had told him before their marriage; he did wonder however, whether Mione knew about H.J. “So how did Sirius find out about H.J. in the first place?”

Harry found himself lying yet again. “He was apprehended when he entered this world and told Sirius why he was here. Once H.J. had sworn an oath that he was telling the truth, Sirius offered to help him.”

Dominus was now convinced that H.J. was the alternate Harry Potter he’d fought again, and that somehow H.J. had obviously managed to retain control of Harry Lupin’s body. “So you also know who I am, don’t you?”

Harry nodded. “You were once known as Lord Voldemort.”

“Quite so.” Dominus acknowledged the fact, before moving on. “Now that matter has been resolved, I’m going to renew my offer to you to join me, Harry.”

Hoping that Dominus wouldn't take it out on Cassandra, Harry shook his head. "I'd rather die."

"Would you rather she died?" Dominus pushed a rapidly paling Cassandra into the sofa again making her whimper as the motion caused something inside of her to tear painfully. "Because if you refuse again, that's what's going to happen."

Harry had little choice in the matter. "No. I'll join you."

"A sensible decision." Dominus smirked behind his mask. "Now there's one final matter I need to address; the most important one actually. I want to know where the Clavis de Propylaeum is."

"Give me your word that you'll let Cammie and Cassandra leave, and I'll take you to it." Harry knew he was taking a chance bargaining with Dominus, but being a werewolf he could sense that Cassandra was dying, even if she didn't know it.

"I give you my word that if it turns out to be genuine, and you co-operate with me, I'll let them leave. But I want you to tell me where the Clavis is as you'll be staying here as I don't trust you enough to let you leave these wards." Dominus wasn't willing to risk Harry leaving, particularly after his last attempt to obtain the Clavis had failed so monumentally. "Where is it, Harry?"

"Let Cassandra go now, and I'll tell you." Harry desperately wanted to get Cassandra to St. Mungo's.

"I'll tell you what, Harry." Dominus counter-bargained. "I'll take Cassandra with me. When I have the Clavis, I'll release her, and on my return, I'll let your niece go."

Having little choice but to trust that Dominus would keep to his side of the bargain, Harry gave directions to where the Clavis had been hidden. "You'll find it in the torch at the top of the Empire State Building. Inside, at the very tip of the flame, you'll find a small niche. Reach inside. It's in there."

Dominus sneered in disbelief. "You truly expect me to believe that?"

"It's the truth." Harry snapped. "I'm hardly going to risk the girls' lives by sending you on a wild goose chase."

"I thought the same thing about the dearly departed Henri but he was willing to give up his wife for what he thought was the genuine article." Dominus stroked Cassandra's hair. "So if you are lying Harry, I just want you to think about this. If I get there and find that it's not genuine, or it's not there, Cassandra will first service the needs of my men I take with me, and then when we get back, she'll be the special guest at a party for anyone who missed out." Dominus dropped down so that his mask brushed against Cassandra's face. "And don't think you're going to get out of it by dying on me. I'll have you healed first, and if it looks as though my men are being a little too rough with you, I'll have you healed again and again until they've all finished with you. And afterwards, whatever's left of you after my men have all had their fun, will be placed into a cell with your Uncle Remus."

Cassandra couldn't stop the tears of fright that were now falling down her face, and she let out a sob.

Harry tugged at the chains, wanting nothing more than to comfort his terrified girlfriend as Dominus trailed his fingers down her body. "You can't expect me to believe that Remus is part of this."

"He's not." Dominus confirmed. "But he's not exactly inaccessible. It would be all too easy for me to obtain him." Dominus moved his hand slightly lower, until his fingers were just resting above the lace trim of Cassandra's panties. "Have you ever seen what a werewolf does with a woman on a full moon, Harry? I have. And I know that after Lupin has finished slaking his lust with Cassandra, he's going to be awfully hungry. I think then would be a perfect time to introduce him to your niece."

Also having witnessed such a display, Harry's stomach threatened to revolt at the visual picture Dominus had created, and he had to take several deep breaths before responding. Dominus could see that

Harry was trying not to vomit. "So for the last time, Harry, is the Clavis where you say it is?"

"Yes. I'm telling the fucking truth." Harry strained desperately at his chains.

"For their sake, I hope you are." Dominus finally removed his hand. "I'll see you later Harry."

Harry watched as Dominus opened the door and floated Cassandra out of the room.

In pain, and absolutely exhausted, Harry sagged in his chains. He found that his sojourn was brief as the metal door opened again after a few minutes, and a slight figure came into the room. "My Master has decided that I can entertain myself while he's gone."

Harry suspected from the voice that it was a woman. "Don't tell me. You can hurt me, but you can't kill me."

"Sadly you're right." The woman withdrew her wand. "My Master seems to like you. Now let's see; where shall I start?"

Harry let out a scream as the woman spun round driving a knife into his leg.

The woman then floated a chair over to where Harry was chained before opening up her cloak to reveal a definite woman's outline. What concerned Harry the most though wasn't the fact that it was a woman, it was the rows of knives that lined the inside of the cloak; knives which the woman began to remove and place on the chair. "Even though I can't kill you, Sebastian, I am going to hurt you. You see, this is what happens when you refuse my Master when he asks for something, and he doesn't get it the first time he asks."

Harry braced himself as yet another knife was driven into his other leg. "Don't have the guts to kill me?"

“No, I’d happily kill you.” The woman dragged another knife across Harry’s bare skin drawing blood as it went deeper the further she pulled it across the tender area. “But I’d prefer to come out of this alive myself.”

“I disagree. I don’t think you’ve got the backbone to do it yourself.” Harry screamed again as the knife was buried in his left arm. “You prefer to hide behind your Master.”

The woman started to get riled at Harry’s words. “You have no idea of what I’m capable of, Sebastian.”

“Obviously not killing someone.” Harry taunted the woman as he struggled against the pain, which was unlike anything else he’d ever felt before.

The woman then drove another knife into Harry’s other arm, this time up to the hilt. As she did so, she began to boast about what she’d done to prove to Harry that she was, indeed, truly capable of what she said she was. “As Black’s sidekick you would have seen what happened to Aditi, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes.” Harry didn’t see any point in denying it.

“That was my handiwork.” The woman hissed at Harry. “Now tell me I haven’t got the guts to kill someone.”

“I don’t believe you.” Harry smiled, knowing it would annoy the woman.

The woman let out a scream of rage, and raised her hand. She stopped, however, before connecting with Harry’s chest, and waggled a finger at Harry. “Nice try, Sebastian.”

Harry wasn’t ready to give up yet. “Not really. All you’ve done is proved that you really don’t have what it takes.”

“I think it’s time you shut up.” The woman had had enough of listening to Harry. “Now what I’m about to do won’t kill you but it will paralyze you.”

Harry could do nothing as the woman stepped away from Harry, and out of range of the anti-animagus ward he knew had been erected around him. She then began to shrink, and a large snake appeared in her place. He grunted loudly as she shot forward, her fangs sinking into his leg as she injected enough venom to achieve what she wanted. She then slithered back across the room before changing back. “I’d give it ten minutes.”

Harry knew then that the woman had been telling the truth about Aditi. He also had a good idea of who the woman was. “So you really did kill Aditi, didn’t you?”

“I told you I did.” The woman snapped.

“It’s just that you appear so incapable of doing something like that, I didn’t believe you.” Harry responded.

The woman sighed loudly and picked a knife up. “I really do wish you’d shut up.”

“It’s not going to happen.” Harry continued to goad the woman.

“I’d like to rip your tongue out but my Master wouldn’t be too happy about that.” The woman tapped the wand against her mask. “So instead what can I do to you that’s going to leave a lasting impression?” She smiled to herself behind the mask before aiming her wand at Harry’s chains. “Fervefacio.”

Harry swallowed hard as the chains around his hands and ankles began to heat up. “I was right about you not having what it takes.” He barely managed to get the words out before he began screaming as the pain of burning flesh became more than he could stand.

The woman stood there for a few minutes and let Harry scream before ending the spell, knowing that the pain would still linger. "Now perhaps you might shut up."

"You wish." Harry spat out, before vomiting as his stomach revolted as the smell of burning flesh became too much for his sensitive sense of smell to withstand.

The woman cleaned it up. "I'm afraid I'm now going to have to punish you for that. Black's back and chest gives me inspiration, and all for such little work on my part." She aimed her wand at Harry's chest. "Verbero Pectus Quinquaginta."

Harry knew that he'd likely pass out long before the punishment reached fifty, or at least he hoped so.

The woman floated the knives off the chair and onto the floor, before turning the chair around to face Harry. "There's nothing quite like the front row at the cinema, now is there Sebastian?"

As he tried to focus his attention on anything but the constant pain from the knife wounds and the sharp but painful lashes across his chest that the invisible whip was inflicting, Harry knew then that he'd been right about who the woman was. "And I hope I have a front row seat when you get your just desserts."

"In your dreams, Sebastian, in your dreams." The woman stood up. "You're not making enough noise, Sebastian; not the kind I want to hear anyway. And I'd like to hear you scream one more time before the snake venom takes away the pleasure."

Getting woozy from the venom, Harry watched through an ever increasing fog as the woman drove a knife into his stomach. Harry knew he was screaming but soon even that stopped.

Next Chapter: Someone makes the ultimate sacrifice. - This probably won't be up for a week or so, as I'm afraid real life is going to get in the way. Happy 4th July to everyone!

Chapter 40: Sacrifice

24th December – England - 3.20 a.m.

After leaving Harry in the cell, Cassandra was lowered onto the floor outside of it, and Thomas walked over to a group of Death Eaters. "I want two men outside this door at all times." He then addressed a slightly shorter, slim Death Eater. "And I want you to teach Sebastian a lesson about what happens when you don't accept something the first time that I offer it. You've got until I get back. But if he dies, then you die."

"Thank you, my Master. I have a few items I need to collect first." The woman then left the area.

Thomas also disappeared before returning a few minutes later, and addressing the two remaining men. "Pick her up."

Cassandra was roughly dragged up onto her feet, pain coursing through her body as her injuries protested her rough treatment. "Ow."

Thomas ignored Cassandra's cry, and pulled out a pen from his pocket. "Portus." He then instructed the two Death Eaters. "We're going on a little trip. So hold on, and don't let go of her."

As usual, the trip was too much for Cassandra, and she vomited over the two Death Eaters as they arrived; neither of whom was very happy as they cleaned themselves up.

"I don't know how long this will take." Thomas glanced at Cassandra. "Do not release her under any circumstances. And please make sure she doesn't die while I'm gone, or you'll be paying the price."

The two men hurriedly agreed to do as they were told, forcing Cassandra to stay upright on her feet, rather than tying her up and dropping her onto the floor as they'd have liked. Thomas then vanished.

Cassandra heard a murmur and suddenly began to feel warm again. "Thank you."

"We're not going to die because you froze to death." One of the men said in a gruff voice.

As the minutes ticked by, Cassandra fought to keep her eyes open but she was fighting a losing battle as the events of the day began to overcome her.

More than an hour later, Thomas smiled as rolled the small spherical object over in his hand, before slipping it into his pocket and apparating back to where his men were supporting a now almost unconscious Cassandra. "Enervate."

Cassandra's eyelids fluttered open. "Harry?"

"No." Thomas cupped her face forcing her to look into his mask. "As Harry kept his side of the bargain, I'm going to keep mine. You're alive, and you're free to go." He then addressed the two men. "Release her."

As Thomas and the two men vanished, Cassandra crumpled to the icy ground, shivering uncontrollably as the warming spell had worn off a few minutes earlier. Aware that she'd die if she remained where she was, she managed to blurt out two words. "Medicus Instanter."

24th December - New York - 12.15a.m. (UK - 5.15 a.m.)

At USAD, Sirius was beginning to fear the worst, when Tabitha burst into the room without knocking. "Sir, Varsity Hospital has admitted a young woman who might be Cassandra."

"The others?" Sirius could feel his heart pounding as he asked.

Tabitha's face fell. "I'm sorry, Sir. The report only mentioned a young woman."

"Tell Michaela that I'm on my way to the hospital. If Harry or Camille Sebastian turn up, get a message to me." Sirius informed her. "Under

the circumstances I'd still like you to act as my liaison here for as long as necessary."

"Gladly, Sir." Tabitha stood aside as Sirius and Remus rushed out of the office and towards the apparition point.

On arriving at the hospital, Sirius and Remus headed for the information desk, Sirius taking point. "My name is Sirius Black, and I believe that you've admitted my daughter, Cassandra."

The nurse scanned her list of patients, and shook her head. "I'm sorry, Sir. But I've got no-one listed by that name."

Remus took over. "She's about five feet six inches tall, she has black hair that falls just below her shoulders, and she'd have been wearing a pale yellow bridesmaid's dress. Most importantly, we believe she'd have arrived by Auror medical portkey."

Having been there when an unconscious, and almost naked, young woman had suddenly appeared, the nurse suddenly knew who Sirius' daughter might be. She therefore immediately got up and led the two men into a side room to sit down. "We did admit a young woman by Auror portkey about forty minutes ago but I can't tell you any more than that. I'll get Healer Settle to come and speak to you."

Sitting next to his friend, Remus could smell his fear and despair, and he placed a comforting arm around Sirius' shoulders. "Don't panic just yet."

Moments later, Sirius shrugged off Remus' arm, and shot to his feet as a white coated healer came into the room. "Healer Settle?"

The Healer shook his head. "I'm Healer Worth. Healer Settle is tied up dealing with the girl you believe you know. Which one of you is Sirius Black?"

"I am. He's Remus Lupin." Sirius identified both of them. "How is she?"

"I can't tell either of you until I know for sure that she's a relative." Leslie Worth just couldn't release information with proof.

Sirius decided to put his status to good use, and pulled out his identification, before he barked out who he was. "I'm Commander Black of British Auror Division, and I believe that the person you're treating is not only my daughter, but an Auror at BritAD, and as such she falls under my aegis. So I want to know why USAD weren't told straight away that she was here, especially as we had a maximum alert in place, and I want an answer to my question about how Cassandra is." Sirius then pulled out a picture of Cassandra. "This is my daughter."

Leslie Worth looked at both the I.D. and the photo, ascertaining that the girl they were treating was indeed Sirius' daughter. He then passed them back to Sirius, and dealt with the first part of Sirius' demand. "Given the critical state she was in, treating your daughter was more important than contacting USAD. Only once we'd stabilized her enough to try and move her, did Healer Settle instruct me to contact USAD."

"So where is Cassandra now?" Sirius' voice was clipped as he asked.

"She's in surgery." Leslie Worth began to explain what had happened with Cassandra. "She's sustained multiple injuries, and..."

"Exactly what kind of injuries?" Sirius snarled, his patience rapidly disappearing as the healer appeared to be avoiding telling him about Cassandra.

Dropping his usual cautious manner, Leslie decided to be blunt, suspecting that that was what Sirius wanted. "She's got a fractured skull, nose and cheekbone; she also has lacerations to her face. In addition, she has three broken ribs and a fractured ankle; whip marks on her back and her breasts; bruising and lacerations over most of her body, particularly her stomach, and massive internal damage."

All the color drained out of Sirius' face, and he lurched back onto the chair. Remus took over the questioning. "Is the internal damage the reason why she's in surgery?"

"Yes. At the moment we're trying to repair it, as we believe that whoever did this to her used the Lacero spell, and judging from the mess they've made, I'd say more than once." Leslie stopped speaking for a moment before delivering the worst possible news in as gentle a voice as he could. "I'm sorry, Commander Black, but the damage is extremely severe, and we still don't know if she'll even make it through the surgery let alone recover from what's been done to her."

Sirius felt as if he'd received a kick in the gut as shock rippled over him, and he dropped his head into his hands. As Sirius struggled not to break down, he heard someone walk over to him, and then speak to him through the fog of fear that seemed to have taken a hold of him. "Take this, Sir."

Sirius glanced up and found Leslie Worth holding a calming potion. "Thank you."

Leslie stepped away as Sirius downed it. "If you'd like to come with me, I need to get back. But you can both wait outside the theater."

Two hours later the doors to the theater swung open, and Leslie Worth walked out looking exhausted. "Seeing as I've already dealt with you, Healer Settle has asked me to talk to you again, Commander Black."

"How did it go?" With the calming potion now out of his system, Sirius couldn't stop his voice from shaking as he prepared himself for the worst.

"I won't lie. Cassandra's condition is being listed as critical. But Healer Settle has managed to repair a good deal of the damage, and stopped the bleeding." Leslie didn't mention that they'd almost lost Cassandra several times. "I'm afraid that now it's just a waiting game."

Sirius was glad he was still sitting down as his legs were shaking. "I was hoping for better news."

"What I've given you is probably the best news you could expect." Leslie hoped he wasn't overstepping his boundaries, and put his hand on Sirius' arm. "Do you want to see her?"

"We both do." Sirius wanted Remus there for support and so, after Leslie had cast a sanitizing spell on all three of them, Sirius and Remus followed the healer into the theater, Sirius shaking violently.

Once inside, Sirius couldn't stop the tears that came to his eyes as he looked into the still swollen and cut face of his barely recognizable daughter. "Can I hold her hand?"

Leslie shook his head. "I'd prefer she isn't moved or jolted in any way. I just thought you'd feel better if you could see that she's come through this."

Ignoring the tears that were running down his cheeks, Sirius resisted the temptation to reach out and stroke Cassandra's damaged face. "Why hasn't her face been healed?"

Even though he didn't know Cassandra, Leslie had had to fight back his own tears at the sight of Cassandra's face as well as the extent of the injuries that had been inflicted on her. "Her body has gone through enough at the moment. Once she's recovering, then we'll perform more magic on her to heal her face, and deal with everything else we didn't repair in favor of fixing her internal organs, and stopping the bleeding."

Remus placed a hand on Sirius' shoulder. "So what happens now?"

"I'm not moving her to a room yet as I don't want to risk re-opening her injuries, so I'll be staying here with her for at least the next eight hours, maybe more. It all depends on how quickly she begins to recover." Leslie didn't bother to add 'or if she recovers' as he believed that the two men were aware that that might still be the case. "Commander Black or one other person can sit with her but no more

than that as we can't have too many people under our feet if we need to act in a hurry."

"Stay with her, Sirius." Remus said softly. "I'll apparate back to USAD and check to see if there is any other news."

"Tell Michaela that she can deal with you in my place. I just need your identification to change your clearance." With trembling hands, Sirius took Remus' I.D., which Remus had as a matter of course from being head of the Watchers' Council, and tapped it with his wand, giving Remus Level 1 BritAD clearance. "I'll see you later." Remus and Sirius hugged before separating; Remus to leave, and Sirius to sit down and wait.

Leslie turned to the junior healer. "Page me if you need me. I'll be back shortly."

Remus had felt Leslie's agitation, and he waited for him outside of the theater. "What's wrong?"

"There's something else I haven't mentioned yet. Normally, as he's Cassandra's superior officer and father, I would have told Commander Black about this but he looks as though he's ready to break. And in the light of Commander Black's change of your clearance and your obvious closeness, I think it might be best if I told you first." Leslie began. "I'm sorry to ask but protocol demands that I still need to view your clearance firsthand before I do."

Remus held out the I.D. that Sirius had just changed. Leslie tapped the identification to check on Remus' clearance. After doing so, he erected a privacy bubble, and got straight to the point. "In addition to being attacked, we also believe that Cassandra may have been raped but we can't tell for sure."

Remus pinched his nose as he fought to breathe.

"Are you alright?" Leslie thought that Remus was going to keel over. "Do you need to sit down?"

Remus didn't respond as he let out a growl and hit the wall to the side of him with his fist. Leslie stared at the wall where Remus' hand had just penetrated it up to his wrist. "That's a solid brick wall."

"And I'm a very angry godfather right now." Remus pulled his hand out of the wall, still not feeling any better despite what he'd just done.

Leslie checked Remus' hand over. "Just bruising and cuts. You're very lucky. I'll get you something to put on it."

"I don't feel very lucky, and my hand will be fine." Remus shoved his throbbing hand into his pocket. "Right now my goddaughter and Sirius are my first priorities, and I want to know what makes you suspect that Cassandra has been raped."

Leslie put it as delicately as he could. "Given her lack of clothing when she was admitted, Healer Settle checked Cassandra over for any signs that she'd been sexually abused, and she found evidence that Cassandra's definitely had sexual intercourse within the last sixteen hours, give or take an hour. Unfortunately due to the swelling and damage she'd sustained, it was impossible to tell whether it was consensual or not."

The news that Cassandra had indeed had sex was a devastating blow to Remus, and like Sirius had earlier, he stumbled over to a chair. "I don't suppose we'll know for sure until she wakes, will we?" He shook his head at himself. "That's a stupid thing to say. She's not even seeing anyone, so I already know the answer." Remus resisted the urge to get up and hit the wall again. "I know this is going to send him over the edge but Sirius is going to have to be told. However I think it's best if I tell him."

Leslie handed over yet another calming potion which Remus gratefully took. "I agree with you. You should also know that Healer Settle cast the strongest contraceptive spell she could, so there's no possibility of a pregnancy."

Remus took some comfort from the only good news he'd heard that evening, apart from the fact that Cassandra had survived at all. After being sanitized, he followed Leslie Worth back into the theater.

Thinking that Remus had some news about the missing pair, Sirius looked hopefully at him. "Harry?"

"Come outside, Sirius." Remus' voice was shaking, and his face grave.

Sirius went out expecting it to be bad news about Harry. "What is it?"

Remus told him, pulling his friend into his arms when Sirius broke down and wept.

24th December 2004 – 5.10 a.m. England

Harry was only vaguely aware that the reason he could no longer scream or move was because the venom had finally done its job.

The woman picked up another knife. "I know you can hear me, Sebastian, even if you can't move. Three guesses where this knife is going." The woman began to drag the knife across Harry's face, scoring a deep gash as she did so.

Harry could feel pain burning across his cheek but was becoming more and more detached from what the woman was doing. It was at that moment that he heard a slight scuffling sound, but he couldn't work out exactly what it was.

The woman was about to find out. "Stupefy." The woman collapsed to the floor. Behind her Cammie was standing behind the sofa, her wand outstretched in her hand, her face tear-stained and blackened with dirt. "Uncle Harry?"

Harry struggled to focus on Cammie, and he tried to say something, only to find out that his vocal cords weren't working.

As she stared at Harry, Cammie realized that Harry was being beaten by something she couldn't see as more marks were appearing on his

already heavily lash marked chest, and she aimed her wand at him. "Finite Incantatum."

She then turned her wand on the woman again. "Petrificus Totalus."

Satisfied that the woman couldn't hurt her, Cammie ran over to Harry, before shaking him gently. "Uncle Harry?"

Harry didn't respond, his head lolling against his chin, so Cammie aimed her wand at him once more. "Enervate." Cammie started to cry when Harry still didn't react. Shaking him more violently, Cammie began to beg. "Please Uncle Harry. Please wake up."

After trying for a few more minutes and getting nowhere, Cammie slumped to the floor, dropped her head onto her knees, and began to cry even harder. Suddenly she gasped as she remembered the part of the conversation she'd overheard just before she'd climbed out of the grille. "Please let me have heard right."

Getting to her feet, Cammie floated the chair the woman had been using over to where Harry was. She then climbed onto it before pulling the vial from her pocket, and tilting Harry's head back. Remembering what Thomas had told her about snake bites, and how to administer the antivenin potion if someone was unconscious, Cammie massaged Harry's throat, forcing him to drink the liquid whether he wanted to or not. A few minutes later, Cammie was relieved beyond belief when Harry groaned. Still standing on the chair, Cammie touched Harry's face. "Uncle Harry?"

"Cammie?" Harry's speech was slurred as he tried to focus on his niece.

Cammie wrapped her arms around Harry's neck. "Thank goodness."

Harry coughed as Cammie was beginning to cut off his airways. "Can't breathe."

Cammie hurriedly released Harry. "Sorry."

Harry sucked in huge gulps of air. "How did you get in?"

"Through the air vent." Cammie pointed to the wall. "It came out behind the sofa. I could hear..." Cammie's voice trailed off.

As the potion did its work, and some of the fog began to clear from Harry's mind, Harry realized that Cammie had obviously heard the woman torturing him. Even though his words were still hesitant, he did his best to reassure his niece. "You stopped it, Cammie."

"I've stunned her." Cammie pointed down to the woman. "And petrified her. Should I do anything else?"

"Incarcerous." Harry took in more huge gulps of air as he tried to shake off the almost detached feeling that still pervaded his body.

Cammie did as Harry instructed, ropes flying out of the end of her wand, and wrapping around the woman. "What now?"

Harry turned his head to look in the direction of the sofa. "Can we both get out through the vent?"

Cammie nodded. "I had to crawl through most of it but it should still be wide enough for you I think." She then asked about the missing person in the group. "The man who brought me down here said he took Cassandra to get something from you. Where is she?"

Harry explained. "That man's name is Dominus, and I've told him where he can get what he wanted, but he's taken Cass with him. He's promised to let her go when he's ascertained that it's genuine."

"Do you think he really will let her go then?" Cammie asked in a worried voice.

"I can only hope so, Cammie." Harry said softly.

In her usual inquisitive manner, Cammie had another question. "Uncle Harry, what he did want from you?"

Harry knew that they really hadn't got time for such a discussion. "That's not important right now as we really need to concentrate on getting you out. Now if that door starts to open, get back behind the sofa, and climb into the vent, and this time don't come back for me."

"Okay." Cammie tugged at the chains holding Harry in place. "How do I get you out of these chains?"

Harry started to tell her. "Cammie, first of all I need you to cast a silencing spell over this room."

Cammie followed Harry's instructions, before turning back to face him. "Okay, now what?"

"The chains are magical. Spells like Reducto won't work on them, and I know that third year unlocking spells aren't going to do the trick either. Dark magic would be our only other non-violent option but I don't want you performing it." Harry would have used dark magic himself but the magic imbued in the chains meant that even if he had a wand, he couldn't perform magic.

Cammie thought that dark magic would be the better option. "Why can't I use dark magic if it's non-violent?"

"Because it's addictive, Cammie, and I refuse to let you go down the same path I once took." Harry didn't think that she would but he wasn't willing to take even the slightest chance. "So to get me out, the spell you need to use is 'Quasso Catena' but you're going to have to stand over here to do it. First though, I need you to practice putting up a shield."

Cammie bit her lip. "Which shielding spell, Uncle Harry?"

" 'Contego Demulceo'." Harry told her. "To practice, aim at me."

Cammie did the spell. "Did I do it right?"

"Try a simple spell on me." Harry then thought of something she could try. "Try 'Somnio'."

Cammie aimed her wand at Harry but nothing happened. "Did it work?"

"It did. Now aim your wand at me and say 'Finite Contego' as I need the shield down." Harry could see that he'd confused Cammie. "Just do it for me, please."

Cammie did as Harry asked. "Okay."

Still not entirely himself, Harry hadn't noticed that the woman had shaken off Cammie's weak stupefy spell, and was now awake. "Now as soon as you've hit the last chain, you need to duck down and use the same shielding spell you've just practiced putting on me, on yourself. But you can't put up the shield until the last chain has been hit, and you're on the other side of the room, otherwise you'll diminish the spell's effects on the chains. And you can't put it around me either as it would have the same dampening effect."

"I understand." Cammie stood three feet away from Harry. "What does this spell do?"

"Disrupts the magic and shatters the chains." Harry informed her. "The spell will ripple up the chains and cause them to shatter as the spell moves along it. So pick the piece of chain furthest away from you each time. That should hopefully give you enough time to get away." Harry had deliberately chosen a spell that he knew, while it would cause him maximum damage, would allow Cammie to remain relatively unharmed.

"Close your eyes then." Cammie aimed at the furthest piece of chain away from Harry and herself. "Quasso Catena." Having to do it several times meant that Cammie wasn't able to get out of the way before the chains started to explode, and she cried out as several pieces of chain hit her before she rolled over to the safety of the couch and got her shield up.

On the other side of the room, Harry couldn't help but scream out loud as hundreds of shards of metal pierced his body as the four

chains exploded around him. The woman lying on the floor had been unable to move or cry out, and she too was hit by multiple pieces of the chain; her mask, cloak and hood becoming pockmarked with the fragments. As the chain finished disintegrating, Harry fell to his knees, letting out another scream as the knives in his stomach and legs were driven deeper as he hit the floor. Harry panted heavily. "Cammie, I need your wand."

Cammie limped over to a very bloody Harry. "Can we go now, Uncle Harry?" Cammie was desperate to get out of the room and away from the woman who was lying on the floor.

"That's the plan." Harry aimed the wand at Cammie. "Demo Catena."

Cammie yelped, as the pieces of chains that had hit her made their way out of her skin. "I think that hurt more."

"You've done really well." Harry encouraged the girl. "Now I suggest you look the other way, and don't turn around until I tell you to."

Cammie did as she was told, as Harry gritted his teeth before pulling the knives out of himself one by one; the one in his stomach almost making him vomit from the pain. He then aimed the wand at the wounds implementing field dressings, and numbing spells.

Harry hadn't attempted to heal the knife wounds, as he knew from the way that they felt, that there had been a substance of some sort on the knives, and he didn't want to seal the wounds without knowing what it was. Picking up one of the knives from the floor, he slipped it into his pocket. Harry then repeated the Demo spell on himself, unable to remain silent as he felt copious pieces of metal rip out of his body. After taking several deep breaths and wiping away the tears that had involuntarily filled his eyes, Harry shakily got to his feet. "You can look now, Cammie."

Cammie turned back just as Harry aimed the wand at the floor. "Evanesco."

Cammie watched all the shards vanish. "Why did you do that?"

"I don't want anyone having samples of your blood." Harry then floated the sofa to one side and looked into the blackness of the hole. "You were really brave, Cammie."

Cammie hadn't felt brave. "I didn't feel that way. I was frightened and just wanted to get out. Even though you said he would, I didn't believe Dominus would really let me go."

"I think he would have." Harry hadn't truly been sure but wanting to reassure her, he smiled at Cammie. "However, to be truthful I'm glad you did it this way. But why didn't you just leave when you got into the air system?"

Cammie admitted that she'd gotten lost. "Once I was in the ducting, I didn't really know where to go, and then I heard that woman and you. So do you think you'll be able to find the way out?"

"I'm sure we'll find the way out." Harry reassured her. "Now get back inside the vent. I'll climb in afterwards and shut off this grille again."

"Okay." Cammie shimmied into the dark tunnel and moved far enough inside to make sure that Harry could follow her. "I'm in."

Before he left, Harry limped over to the woman. Kneeling down, and pulling back his fist, he punched the damaged mask as hard as he could. From the force Harry used, the woman was knocked unconscious, and the mask cracked in several places; a number of pieces coming away from the sides to reveal several locks of red hair.

Feeling even more lightheaded, and aware that time was of the essence, Harry decided to use an alternative to violence. "Insignio Familia Potter Tergo Auris." For the spell he'd decided to use to work properly, Harry had had to use his true family name. Deciding it was definitely time to go, Harry hurried over to the vent opening and climbed in. Finally, he used a spell to maneuver the grille into place before casting yet another one to secure the screws behind him. "Defigo."

Cammie hadn't known that spell. "Uncle Harry, I had to leave a chair and the grille in my bathroom. I didn't know how to shut the grille behind me."

"Don't worry about it." Harry told her even as he worried about it. Not wanting to make any noise, Harry cast a silencing spell and lit up the wand. "Can you remember where you came from?"

Cammie could. "I came from the left after dropping down a large tube. I think it leads to the next floor up."

"Go back that way then as I think this is a basement." Harry held out his hand. "Take the wand so you can see where you're going."

Harry used his night vision abilities to make his way to Cammie's side, before taking the wand from her and lighting up the tube above him. "Elucidus Pulvis."

Cammie gasped as little particles of light danced above her head, lighting up blackness that had pervaded the tube. "Wow, that's really pretty."

"It doesn't last long." Harry didn't really need the spell to see where he was going but had done it to make Cammie feel better. "Cammie, I need you to levitate me up and then throw the wand up to me."

"I don't know if I can." Cammie said nervously. "I'm afraid of dropping you."

"I'll put a cushioning charm in place." Harry did exactly that before passing over the wand. "I know you can do this."

"Okay, Uncle Harry." Cammie determinedly took the wand and aimed it at Harry. "Wingardium Leviosa."

Harry estimated that the tube was a good fifteen feet high as he floated upwards, his hand trailing the wall until he came to a gap. "You're doing great. Which side did you come from?"

Cammie thought for a moment, as she concentrated on holding Harry in the air. "The right."

Harry decided that they should check out the other side. "In that case, maneuver me to the left."

Cammie carefully did as she was instructed, relief flooding her when Harry called out to tell her he was there. "Now throw the wand up."

Cammie had to try several times before she finally made it. "Have you got it?"

"Yes." Harry lit up the area again as the lighting spell was beginning to fade. Worried because he was still feeling dizzy, Harry used an affixing spell to stick his legs to the tunnel as he leaned over the edge so that he could use the flotation spell on Cammie. "Cammie, now just relax. I won't drop you."

"I trust you." Cammie wasn't nervous as she knew there was a cushioning spell beneath her, and it was the same spell she'd used in order to get down in the first place.

Once she was sitting next to him, Harry handed the wand back to his niece. "I need to do something. I promise I'll be back as quick as I can." Harry changed into his animagus form, and ran down the tube before returning a few minutes later, and changing back. "There's an outside vent this way. Cammie, start crawling."

After some tricky maneuvering the pair soon found themselves at the outside grate where Harry used a different spell than Cammie had to undo the screws. He then climbed out before pulling Cammie out next to him. Harry shivered and transfigured their clothing and shoes into something warmer and more suitable to the climate. "Now we're a little warmer, we're going to walk towards that group of trees in the distance."

Moonlight lit the pair up as they made their way towards the darkened clump of trees several miles ahead. "How do you know that that's the way out?" Cammie asked as she walked.

Harry answered her question. "I'm looking for where the wards come to an end."

"How will you know?" Cammie asked yet another question.

Harry knew that if he talked to his niece, it would distract her, as well as him. "Because when we go through the wards, you should experience a tingle pass over your body, making you feel as if you want to shiver and sneeze at the same time."

"Okay then." As she walked along, Cammie kept waiting for the feeling Harry had described to her to happen.

She wasn't alone, as Harry found himself hoping that the wards would come to an end soon, particularly as he could feel himself getting weaker and dizzier by the second.

Wanting something to pass the time as she walked, Cammie decided that now was as good a time as any to talk to Harry about what Dominus had wanted. "Uncle Harry, what did Dominus want? We're out now, so will you tell me?"

Harry had no idea that his judgment was being impaired by the poisons that had been coating the knives, and he happily told Cammie about what Dominus had been after; something he'd never have done if he'd been completely lucid. "He was after something called the Clavis de Propylaeum."

"What's that?" Cammie had never heard of it before.

"It's a magical object that's part of something called the Four Pillars." Harry informed his niece.

Cammie frowned as the name rang a bell. "Don't you mean the Four Pilasters?"

Harry stopped walking in surprise as he wondered how his niece had even heard of something that sounded so similar. "Cammie, I want you tell me what you know about them."

Cammie scrunched up her face as she tried to remember what she'd read. "When Uncle Thomas and Aunt Mione took me to Egypt there was something at the Museum called the..." Cammie couldn't remember the proper name. "It was the something or other Cartouches."

Harry put his arm around Cammie's shoulders. "We'd better keep walking while you talk."

Cammie set off again. "Anyway, there was an archeologist whose name I don't remember but he said that the thingy Cartouches were part of the Four Pilasters, and that they'd help you live forever. Aunt Mione said it was Muggle twaddle."

"Did the archeologist say what the Four Pilasters were?" Harry's heart was racing as he realized that the two similarly named group of objects might well be the same thing.

Cammie nodded. "Yes, he said that they were spring and sign. I can't remember the other two but they began with an 's' as well. I can remember that the Cartouches weren't the spring or the sign."

Harry couldn't believe that the sort of information he'd been searching for had been in his niece's mind all this time. "Un fucking believable."

Unaware that poison was affecting Harry's lack of decorum, Cammie was more than a little shocked to hear Harry swear. "So was Aunt Mione wrong about them being Muggle twaddle, Uncle Harry?"

Harry nodded. "You're damn right she was wrong. Was all this information at the Museum?"

“No. It was in an Egyptian book that Aunt Mione bought for me at a Muggle bookstore.” Cammie wished she’d read the book more than once.

Harry shook his head in disbelief. “No wonder I’ve not been able to find anything in a magical book.” He had another question for Cammie. “Is there anything else that you can remember?”

“Whoops.” Cammie stumbled as she closed her eyes as she tried to recall the passage, forcing Harry to grab her to hold her upright. “I don’t think...” Cammie snapped her fingers. “Yes, there should have been a stone with the Cartouches that told people how to do a magic ritual but it vanished.”

Harry stopped walking as a massive wave of dizziness hit him. Once it had passed he started walking again. “Cammie, the first thing I need you to do when we get back is to tell Sirius everything you’ve just told me. It’s very important. Do you understand?”

Cammie nodded. “Why is this so important though?”

“Cammie, this is going to sound a little crazy but Dominus isn’t from this world.” In his drug induced state, Harry decided that Cammie was old enough to know what was going on especially as she’d been dragged into the middle of it. “Neither am I.” Before he could continue, Harry had to stop as pain cut through him. “I don’t suppose you’ve got any painkilling potion on you have you?”

Cammie shook her head. “Sorry Uncle Harry. Where does it hurt?”

“Everywhere.” Harry wondered what had been on the knives, as the pain where each one of them had either pierced or touched his body was getting to the point of becoming almost unbearable.

In the moonlight Cammie could see what looked like a layer of liquid on Harry’s face. Reaching up, she touched Harry’s cheek and found his skin was clammy under her fingers. “Uncle Harry, I think you’re bleeding.”

Harry didn't think so. "I think it's sweat, Cammie, not blood." In a haze, Harry wasn't aware that he was starting to go into shock. "Don't worry about it. I'll be fine."

Cammie took Harry at his word, and continued to pepper him with questions. "You're not really from another world, are you?"

Harry was annoyed that Cammie didn't believe him. "Just give me the wand."

Cammie handed it over and watched as Harry proceeded to cast a somewhat indistinct oath to say that he was telling the truth. "Why did you do that?"

"Because you didn't really believe what I was telling you." Harry didn't bother to hide his lack of pain from the oath as he didn't think about it.

Stunned that Harry had been telling the truth, Cammie realized something. "What about Dad? If he's your brother, then he can't be from here either."

"He's not." Harry confirmed.

"So why are you here?" Cammie was reeling that Harry was telling the truth but natural inquisitiveness overrode her shock.

Harry explained. "Because in our world Dominus was known as Lord Voldemort but he's far worse than your Voldie ever was." Harry stopped talking as he had to concentrate to try and remember what Cammie had asked him as he was becoming more and more confused as time went by. "Um, your Dad fought him and we thought he'd kill him but we found out that he hadn't and that Voldie ended up here instead. So we followed him to try and stop him from destroying this world."

"Why follow him?" Cammie could see the trees getting closer as she walked.

“Because I'm destined to kill him.” Harry dropped to his knees as pain seemed to explode in his stomach.

Cammie dropped to the ground beside him. “We're almost at the trees, Uncle Harry.”

“I'm not feeling so good.” Harry pulled off his medical ring and pushed it onto Cammie's hand. “Put this on. Once you're through the wards you'll have to say ‘Medicus Instante Harry Sebastian’ as the ring is set up for me.”

“I can't leave you, Uncle Harry.” Cammie answered tearfully, as she began to realize that Harry might not make it.

Harry took Cammie's hand again, and shoved the wand into it. “Yes you can.”

“But I don't know where I'll be.” Cammie protested as she tried to think of an excuse why she couldn't leave Harry behind.

“It will take you to, err, safety.” Even though he tried, Harry couldn't remember the names of any of the wizarding hospitals so had settled with just saying 'safety'. “Now I'm going to follow you but I want you to run on ahead.”

Cammie shook her head. “I'll wait for you, Uncle Harry.”

Harry got to his feet. “Bloody well do as you're told and go.”

Again shocked by Harry's use of bad language, Cammie did as he said. But with all of her attention focused on running towards the tree line, Cammie didn't notice that Harry hadn't taken a single step but instead had collapsed almost immediately. After a relatively short distance Cammie felt the urge to sneeze and shiver and she knew that she'd passed through the wards. Cammie turned around. “Uncle Harry, I...”

Chills ran down Cammie's back when she couldn't see him. Terrified at being left alone, Cammie called out. “Uncle Harry?”

Not getting an answer, she guessed correctly that he'd passed out. Ignoring what Harry had told her, Cammie didn't want to leave him when they were so close to getting out, so she lit up the end of her wand. "Lumos." Holding it high above her head, she returned the way she'd come and scanned the ground until she spotted Harry. Aiming her wand at him, she again spoke the spell that she knew would allow her to get him to safety. "Wingardium Leviosa."

24th December 2004 – 12.50a.m. – New York (England 5.50 a.m.)

Studying the sphere in the box in front of him, Thomas settled back into his seat as his jet left JFK airport. When he'd arrived where Harry had indicated, Thomas had at first been dubious that Harry had been telling the truth; that was until Thomas had found out that there was a magical dampening field around the Clavis' hiding place. After scanning the area, Thomas had discovered that the dampening field was massive as well as complicated, and it had taken Thomas quite some time to disperse it from a distance. After closing the lid, Thomas put the box to one side, aware that he'd be stupid to mess with the Clavis in the restricted confines of the aircraft as he had no idea of exactly how it worked.

Geraldine walked up to him as the aircraft had leveled off. "Can I get you something to drink, Mr. Seville?"

"A large scotch please." As the attendant fixed his drink, Thomas debated what to do with Harry. He knew he wanted him but he had a feeling that after the resistance Harry had initially shown, he might be far more trouble than he was worth. Thomas also had a nagging suspicion that Harry would have fought him tooth and nail if Thomas hadn't had Cassandra and Cammie there to tip the scales in his own favor. Thomas thought about it for a few more seconds before deciding that Harry would either bend to his will or he'd die.

Geraldine handed over the glass. "Will that be all, Sir?"

"It will." Thomas sniffed appreciatively at the scotch before taking a mouthful, and thinking about his niece. When she'd kicked him, he'd

almost lost his temper and was conscious of the fact that if Harry hadn't intervened he might have gone further than he intended to. He did, however, intend to release Cammie once Harry had taken the Dark Mark.

Finally he turned his thoughts to Cassandra. He knew from Healer Rivers who'd patched her up before Thomas had taken her into Harry's cell, that the damage to her body had been extensive, and that the portkey trip to New York he'd forced her to take, had taken its toll on her already battered body. As he rolled his scotch around the glass, the ice tinkling as it hit the cut crystal, Thomas wondered whether he'd be attending a funeral that week, and made a mental note to purchase a new suit to go with his winter cashmere coat just in case.

Putting down the glass, Thomas unshrunk the briefcase he'd collected from his office before leaving England, and pulled out some work that he needed to get done before the New Year. One of Thomas' most enviable traits was his ability to compartmentalize his life, so, in his usual efficient manner, he pushed aside all thoughts of what had gone on that night, and settled down to do his work.

He'd barely begun when he felt his ring vibrate, telling him that something had frightened Cammie enough to trigger the ring. Knowing that the house was warded and he shouldn't have been able to detect Cammie's distress, Thomas frowned and threw down the pen. His ring had stopped vibrating by then but it had been long enough for Thomas to get a lock onto where he needed to portkey to. Scowling, he grabbed his mask from inside his cloak that lay on the seat opposite, transfigured his clothing, and vanished.

24th December 2004 – 6.10 a.m. - England

On arrival, Thomas found himself standing outdoors, a setting moon lighting up the area around him. Sinking back into the shadows cast by the trees, Thomas watched his niece heading towards him, using a spell to float an unconscious Harry in front of her. He waited until she came into the clearing before stepping in between her and Harry. "Hello, Cammie."

Cammie screamed as the gold-masked man stepped out, and Harry crashed to the ground as she lost her concentration.

Thomas ignored Harry for the time being. "I see you didn't keep your promise about not using your wand unless it was an emergency."

"Escaping was an emergency." Cammie protested in a shaky voice.

Thomas had to admit that she had a point. "So you found a loophole. But you didn't need it as I said that I'd let you go."

"I didn't believe you." Cammie took several steps backwards as Thomas advanced on her, and she held up her wand. "Don't come any closer."

Thomas' ring's urgent vibrations told him that Cammie was absolutely terrified, and so he stopped moving. "I really am going to let you go, Cammie."

"I don't believe you." Cammie's voice shook with fear.

"I've never lied to you, Cammie." Thomas told her truthfully.

Cammie glanced over at Harry. "What about Uncle Harry?"

"I'm afraid that Harry has signed his own death warrant by attempting to escape." Thomas glanced over to where an unconscious Harry lay oblivious to the proceedings.

Cammie went white. "No."

Thomas unholstered his wand. "If you don't want to see this, I suggest you turn away."

As Thomas opened his mouth to cast the killing curse, Cammie aimed her shaking wand at him. "Reducto."

Cammie missed but it was enough to distract Thomas from what he was doing. Thomas was both annoyed and impressed at the same time. "I didn't think you had it in you to attack me."

Neither did Cammie. "I couldn't let you kill Uncle Harry."

"All you've done is to delay the inevitable." Thomas turned his wand on Cammie and held out his hand. "Now give me the wand."

Cammie shook her head. "No."

"I said hand over the wand." Thomas snapped. "I don't want to hurt you but if you don't hand it over, I will."

If, in his befuddled state, Harry had known that what he'd told Cammie about who he and Dominus were would influence Cammie's decision as to what to do next, perhaps he would have struggled harder against the poison's effects. Unfortunately as Harry couldn't see into the future, he had had no way of knowing that Cammie was about to set in motion one of the bravest things she'd ever done. Remembering what Harry had said about him being the one destined to kill Dominus, and knowing that Harry knew about the Four Pilasters, Cammie carefully slid off Harry's ring as she passed the wand to Thomas; 'accidentally' dropping the wand to the floor rather than placing it into his hand. "I'm sorry."

As Thomas automatically glanced down, Cammie threw the medical ring onto Harry, relief running through her as it hit him. Taking a deep breath, Cammie spoke the words that she knew would take Harry to safety, leaving her behind to face the consequences. "Medicus Instanter Harry Sebastian."

Next Chapter: We discover the fates of Harry, Cassandra and Cammie

Chapter 40: Aftermath

24th December – 3 a.m. New York (8 a.m. England)

As Remus reached the reception area, he found the same nurse he'd spoken to earlier waiting for him. "Yes?"

"I've a note for Commander Black if you wouldn't mind telling him." The nurse knew from the automatically updating information on the parchment in front of her that Sirius was still in the theater with Cassandra.

Remus showed his I.D. "I'll take it." After opening the missive, Remus thanked the nurse and, instead of bothering Sirius, headed for USAD.

A drained Tabitha jumped to her feet as Remus walked into the office he and Sirius had been using earlier. "I'm taking over for Commander Black." He then showed her his clearance. "The note you left said that Harry has been admitted to St. Mungo's. But there's nothing about Cammie."

"Auror Sebastian was alone. We've heard nothing about Cammie at all." Tabitha could see the disappointment on Remus' face at the news. "How is Cassandra, Sir?"

"She made it through the surgery, and we're hopeful that she'll be alright." Remus could feel genuine concern coming from the girl. "Do you know anything more about Harry than just the fact he's been admitted?"

Tabitha nodded as she'd been checking regularly. "He's being dealt with by a Healer Christiansen and her team. Apparently, like Cassandra, Harry's injuries are both extensive and life-threatening, so he's being listed as critical."

Given Cassandra's condition, Remus wasn't surprised. "I need to go back to Varsity to tell Sirius about Harry but after that I'm returning to England, and so if you need me I can be contacted at St. Mungo's. If you can't find me, contact Healer Delaney as he's the Black family's

Healer as well as a friend. You can tell him anything you can tell me about Cassandra and her condition.”

“I understand, Sir, and I’ll do that.” Tabitha promised.

Remus could see that the girl was exhausted. “Actually pass that message onto someone else, and try to get some sleep.”

“Emily Bradford is going to be coming in shortly, so she’ll take over from me.” Tabitha informed Remus.

“Thank you for your help.” After taking his leave of Tabitha, Remus headed for the apparition point and back to the hospital.

In the theater, Sirius glanced up as Remus came in. “Do you have any news?”

Remus nodded. “Harry’s at St. Mungo’s but his injuries mean that he’s being listed as critical. However, there’s no sign of Cammie.”

Sirius knew that wasn’t good. “I know it should be my job but could you tell H.J.? I can’t leave Cassie.”

“I don’t expect you to.” Remus yawned. “I’m going to St. Mungo’s but I’ll come back once I’ve established what’s happening.”

“Try to get some sleep before you return. Cassie’s a little better so once they move her to a room, I’m going to try and get some shut-eye myself.” Sirius was hopeful that they’d be moving Cassandra later that morning, as a few minutes earlier, Leslie Worth had told him that Cassandra had stabilized and her vitals were beginning to improve.

Remus ignored Sirius’ first comment, as he knew it was doubtful he’d be sleeping anytime soon. “I’ve asked the nursing station to contact me at St. Mungo’s if Cammie turns up, and the same with USAD.”

Neither man wanted to say out loud that they didn’t think the young girl would make it back.

Sirius stood up and hugged Remus. "I have no idea what I'd have done today without you."

Remus hugged Sirius back just as firmly. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

"I'll see you later then." Sirius turned his attention back to his daughter as Remus walked out.

Once at St. Mungo's, Remus was directed to Harry's room, and found himself showing his identification yet again to the Aurors standing guard outside before opening up the door. Once inside he found James and Tonks sitting at Harry's bedside, Tonks holding Harry's hand.

James immediately got up and hugged Remus. "I'm surprised they let you in. I had to drag Moody out of bed to get me clearance to get me inside the hospital."

"Sirius has given me level 1 clearance." Remus informed his friend. "But he's had to stay with Cassandra."

"How's she doing?" Tonks stood up, her voice trembling as she asked about her cousin.

Remus outlined Cassandra's injuries but didn't mention what Leslie suspected. "There's little we can do except wait."

"It's the same with Harry." James glanced over at the young man who was lying motionless in the bed. "I'd been sitting at the arrivals area waiting for some sort of news on Cassandra when Harry suddenly appeared. He was an absolute bloody mess. Jennifer Christiansen dealt with him first but Craig and Bella both came in about fifty minutes ago, so Craig's taken over Harry's case. Unfortunately when he checked him over, Craig said that Harry's slipped into a coma."

"Shit." Remus sat down. "Do you know what his injuries were?"

James passed on what Healer Christiansen had told him. "According to Jennifer, he'd been subjected to various curses including the Cruciatus; he had numerous lacerations, including lash marks on his chest; he'd been bitten by a snake and treated; she also counted five stab wounds in his arms, legs and stomach. His most severe injuries apart from his stomach wound, were third degree burns around his wrists and ankles."

"But that still shouldn't be enough to put him into a coma." Remus protested, more aware of Harry's physiological make-up than any of them.

"Harry had the good sense to bring back a knife with him; Jennifer found it in his pocket." James explained what they'd discovered. "She found traces of silver nitrate, Belladonna, and several other poisons on the blade. Not lethal amounts for a normal person and on a normal knife. But with Harry's makeup, and given that the blade was magical, which seemed to multiply the effects of the compounds on it twenty-fold, it didn't do Harry any good. The silver nitrate, even though it was a small amount, had started to eat into him. In addition to some possible scarring from his burns, Harry's definitely going to have some serious scarring from the silver nitrate on his arms, legs and stomach, as well as a scar on his face where someone obviously drew the knife across it."

"He will come out of the coma, though, won't he?" Remus asked in an unsure voice.

"Craig is hopeful but as you know there's a full moon on Boxing Day, and Craig doesn't know how Harry's body is going to react to the change." James knew that Remus more than any of them would understand this.

"So it's a waiting game for both Cassandra and Harry then." Remus could see that Christmas was going to be anything but happy that year. "Thanks James. I'd best go and tell H.J. about Cammie."

"She wasn't with Cassandra?" James had assumed that the young girl had been with Cassandra.

“No, and she’s got no medical ring to get her back.” Remus reminded James.

“Speaking of medical rings, Harry wasn’t actually wearing his when he appeared.” James had seen it lying on Harry’s stomach. “Why would he take it off?”

“Perhaps he was going to give it to Cammie when something happened.” Remus shrugged. “There are numerous possibilities, and unless Harry regains consciousness or Cammie returns, we won’t know what happened.”

“Do you want me to come with you?” James offered, as everyone had converged at his home.

Remus nodded. “If Tonks will be alright with Harry.”

“I will.” Tonks assured Remus.

James kissed his wife. “I’ll be back once we’ve spoken to H.J.”

H.J. immediately jumped to his feet when the two men apparated into James’ home. “James, what the hell is happening? I’ve been to the hospital several times, but no-one will let me past security. I know they’ve admitted Harry but again no-one would let me see him, even though I’m his brother, as they said I don’t have clearance. They told me just to go home and wait for news. It’s...”

“Sit down.” Remus interceded. “Please, H.J.”

“Just tell me.” H.J. demanded.

“Harry, as you know is being treated here, and Cassandra is being treated at Varsity in New York.” Remus began, as he knew that they should have received word from USAD.

“And Cammie?” Hermione asked softly, her face tearstained from the crying she’d already done.

Remus shook his head. "I'm sorry, she's not back yet. As you probably already know, Cassandra was admitted by Auror medical portkey just over six hours ago, and Harry by the same method a short time later. What we don't know is why they were admitted to different hospitals. So given the time difference, and the different hospitals, we're still hopeful that Cammie will turn up."

"But unlike Harry and Cassandra, Cammie isn't an Auror, and doesn't have the same back-up they do. And she can't apparate, Remus." H.J.'s voice was completely without hope.

Remus wished he had better news. "I'm so sorry, H.J. We're doing..."

"I can't, Remus. I just can't right now." With that H.J. walked out, Hermione on his heels.

Xander slipped an arm around his red-eyed wife. "Do you truly think that there's a chance Cammie will make it back, Remus?"

"We can only hope." Remus sat down at the table.

"Are you going back to New York?" Faith was tired, and it showed.

Remus made her sit down as well. "I will be eventually. Faith, you need to look after yourself. Sirius is worried enough about Cassandra without having to take care of you too."

Katherine knew that Remus wasn't being intentionally short with Faith, and so she butted in. "I'll take care of her, Uncle Remus."

"Thank you." Remus gave a brief smile.

Orion, however, had other plans than taking care of his stepmother. "Uncle Remus, I need to go to New York."

Understanding, Remus asked James for some parchment before writing something down, tapping it with his wand, and then picking up a second piece of parchment and casting the Portus spell on it. "The

password is your sister's middle name, and this will take you to USAD, New York. Once there, hand them this note. They should then take you to Varsity, and get you through security. Cassandra is being treated on the fifth floor. But don't expect to be let into the theater. Only your Dad is allowed in at the moment, but he's hopeful she'll be moved soon."

Luna immediately got up. "I also want to see Cassandra if I can."

"She's in pretty bad shape, Luna." Remus realized he hadn't told anyone how bad yet. "They didn't think she'd make it through the surgery at one point, so I doubt very much whether they'll let anyone other than family in. I'm sorry but you're going to have to stay here."

Orion hadn't realized that his sister was so ill. "Is she going to be alright, Uncle Remus?"

"I really don't know, Orion." Remus didn't want to sugarcoat the situation as, after seeing Cassandra, he was aware that her life still hung in the balance. "But she'd improved slightly when I left."

"I'm going to get some stuff for Dad and Cass, and then I'm off." Orion informed them.

"I've have something I want you to take for me." Faith climbed back to her feet. "But I'll have to walk around the corner back to the house as I can't be portkeyed or apparated." Craig had advised against it this late in Faith's pregnancy.

"Let's go then." With that, Katherine, Orion and Faith left.

After they'd left, Xander asked after his friend. "What about Harry? I know he's being treated but how bad is he?"

"Not much better than Cassandra I'm afraid but unlike her, he hasn't had major surgery and I should think he'd be allowed visitors." Remus looked at James, who nodded. "So if anyone wants to see Harry, then I think that would be permissible."

Xander did. "I'm coming with you. I have to make sure that he's alright."

Luna kissed Xander trying to comfort him as she knew what was bothering him. "This wasn't your fault."

"But I feel as if it is." Xander knew logically it wasn't but as he'd pointed out to Harry, karma had definitely come back to bite him in the ass.

As he watched the couple together, Remus realized something, and motioned to Xander. "Can I have a quick word?"

Xander walked over to Remus, and Remus erected a privacy bubble. "I know this probably isn't the best time to mention this, but are you aware that you need to consummate your marriage within 24 hours?"

"Done and dusted." Xander sighed. "Not quite in the way I imagined but Luna said we'd better get it out of the way in case something else horrible happened."

Remus winced at Xander's description. "I only mentioned it because you've got less than eight hours left, and not to be nosy."

"I know that." Xander gave Remus a tight smile. "Can we go see Harry now?"

"I'm just waiting on H.J." Remus didn't want to leave without speaking to Cammie's father again.

A few minutes later, H.J. stepped back into the room; he'd obviously taken calming potion, as his voice, although shaky, was clear of tears. "Thank you for coming to tell me."

"I'm sorry, H.J." Remus felt terrible for H.J. "Where's Hermione?" Remus had noticed that Hermione was no longer with H.J.

"Sleeping potion." H.J. had had to literally force Hermione to take it. "She needs some sleep."

“I’m going back to the hospital.” Remus turned to face the room. “H.J., do you want come with me?”

H.J. nodded. “If Cammie does turn up, I want to be there.”

“I’ll have to apparate you in as you won’t be able to get through the security that’s in place.” Remus told him. “I’ll take you and Xander, if James doesn’t mind taking Luna.”

“Should we just hang here?” Buffy, who’d made the trip with Willow and the others, asked.

“Yes. Call for Bond if you need anything.” James said hurriedly. “He can show you to a bedroom, fix food or provide anything else you need. I should be back later, so make yourself at home.” He then tapped, and handed over two coins. “If you go out, you’ll need these to be able to get back to the house, otherwise the Muggle repelling spells will make you think you need to be somewhere else.”

The two young women thanked James before he, Remus and the others vanished, leaving them alone.

Buffy turned to Willow. “So, Will, what do you want to do?”

“Sleep.” Willow yawned. “How about you?”

“Walk.” Buffy had fallen asleep earlier, and now felt too keyed up to sleep again. “So I’ll take a coin and see you later.”

With that the two girls split up; Buffy out of the front door, and Willow up to the room she’d already been allocated.

On arriving at St. Mungo’s, Remus staggered as he appeared. He could feel that he was getting tired as he’d struggled to concentrate with two passengers. “I think I need to find some pepper-up.”

Luna fished in her pocket. "I've got plenty. It's the only way I could stay awake. I don't know how you're still standing with all the portkeying and apparating I know you must have been doing."

"I'm getting tired now." Remus took the potion and shuddered at the sensations it evoked. "I hate taking that."

"I'd best take one as well." H.J. also took a vial and reacted similarly to Remus. "So where are we going?"

"Third floor." Remus went to walk past the nurse on duty, who stopped him. "Yes?"

"I have a message for either you or Commander Black, Mr. Lupin." The nurse handed over an envelope with both Remus' and Sirius' names written on it.

Remus opened the note, and turned to the others. "It's from Thomas. Mione's going to be fine but he's taken her back to Grimmauld Square to be cared for, and he'll be in touch."

Luna let out a sigh of relief. "Thank goodness she's alright. H.J. also asked about Mione when he was here but no-one would tell him anything."

Remus felt a twinge of guilt that he'd completely forgotten about Mione being injured in his concern over Harry and Cassandra. "We'll go check on Harry now."

The group had been about to leave yet again, when Julianne Solace appeared, and she hurried over to H.J. "This was delivered to BritAD care of Auror Sebastian for you. It's been checked for anything adverse."

H.J. opened the envelope to find a lock of hair, an empty vial, and a necklace accompanying a piece of folded parchment. H.J. couldn't bring himself to open the parchment, and instead passed it to Remus.

Remus unfolded it, and read it out loud.

“Harry Potter,

Your daughter, or should I say your ‘cousin’, was very brave stepping in to help Sebastian escape but also very stupid. Now, as we both know exactly how I reward such behavior, I am enclosing a couple of mementoes, as I thought you might like something to remember Cammie by. Until we meet again.

Dominus.”

Luna burst into tears and turned to Xander, who too was visibly upset.

However, it was H.J. who naturally took the news the hardest. “He knows who I am.” H.J. sank to the floor clutching the items that had been sent to him. “And he’s taken my little girl from me. She’s not coming back, James. She’s not ever coming back.”

James knelt down beside H.J. “Do you want me to take you home?”

H.J. simply nodded.

“Let’s get you home, then.” James put his arm around H.J. and the two then vanished.

Remus turned to Luna and Xander. “Do you want to go home?”

Luna shook her head, tears still trickling off her nose. “I want to see Harry.”

“So do I.” Xander wasn’t leaving until he’d seen him.

“Let’s go then.” A very deflated group headed for Harry’s room.

Castrum House, Shropshire

Thomas walked into his sitting room to find Regulus waiting for him. “Tell me. How long did Malfoy last?”

Regulus had had to watch Draco die slowly as his flesh had turned to ashes, soon followed by the rest of his body from the spell that H.J. had cast on him. Thomas had refused to administer the counterspell; instead altering the spell so that it took longer than it normally would have. "He died about two hours ago."

"I'd best pass my condolences on to his widow." Thomas said coldly. "On second thoughts you can. Tell Pansy that I don't give second chances often, and her husband blew his."

Regulus had been there when Draco had admitted to deliberately continuing to target Mione even after she'd been injured by another Death Eater, as a form of revenge for what Thomas had done to him at Thomas' wedding. Lucius had immediately washed his hands of son. "He didn't know who you were, Thomas."

Thomas didn't care that Draco couldn't remember that he was really Dominus. "He didn't need to know that I was Dominus, Regulus. I threatened him last time as myself, and he was still stupid enough to attack Mione while I was standing there. Malfoy should have remembered my warning that if he even glanced at my wife again, he wouldn't survive our next encounter. And, I like to believe I'm a man of my word."

"What about my niece?" Regulus was conscious that he was skating on thin ice with his somewhat condescending tone, but Thomas had said that Cassandra would be unharmed if Harry co-operated, and that hadn't turned out to be the case.

"I didn't authorize what happened to her up until she was taken into Harry's cell. In fact I said that she wasn't to be harmed, and the culprit was punished accordingly." Thomas met Regulus' gaze. "I did, however, use a single lash mark on her when Harry didn't co-operate with me. I also threatened her, dragged her to New York by portkey, and then released her. Do you have a problem with that?"

"No." Regulus ground out. He hadn't expected Thomas to apologize as Regulus had already spoken to Healer Rivers, who'd told him who

had inflicted most of the damage to his niece. "But I would like an hour with the man who did hurt her."

"Granted." Thomas was more than aware that despite his denial, Regulus was angry with him, but he was also aware that Regulus wouldn't do anything about it. Walking over to his fruit bowl, Thomas picked up an apple and tapped it. "Portus. It's the usual password. This will take you to his home."

"Thank you." Regulus then asked about the one person he knew that Thomas did care about. "And what about your niece? The rumor is that she helped Sebastian escape."

"She did, and I've already dealt with her." Thomas didn't elaborate. "Her father should be aware by now that his precious daughter won't be returning."

"And the men who were guarding Sebastian's cell?" Regulus had them held in a cell.

"I'm lining up something special for them." Thomas said cryptically. "So they're to remain where they are." Thomas stood up and slipped his mask on. "I think I'd better check on Lily's progress." With that, Thomas vanished, reappearing inside the cell where Lily Snape was hanging from chains, her arms and legs distorted, and her red hair falling over her face. "I don't know, Lily. What am I going to do with you? You are supposed to be one of my elite, yet you let a fourteen year old girl best you."

Lily was almost unconscious from the pain, and didn't respond until the Death Eater at the side of her cast another bone-breaking spell making Lily scream out, but even her screams were getting quieter. Thomas held up his hand. "Enough. I think I've made my point. You can send Rivers in to heal her after dinner. I'll be speaking to her then."

The man bowed low and left. Thomas then apparated back to his room, where he removed his mask. "I need to speak to Lily in a few

hours so I'll be staying here until then. When you've returned from your little trip, I'd like you to join me for dinner."

"You've let her live?" Regulus had expected Thomas to kill her.

Thomas explained his reasoning. "She's a vicious bitch and is usually good at her job. And I can't say that she failed when she dealt with Harry, as he's being listed as critical."

"You're not going to offer the cure?" Regulus knew about the compound that Lily liked to use on her knives.

Thomas shook his head. "I was going to kill him before Cammie foolishly interfered, so no. If he survives, and that's doubtful, I'm not wasting my time again in going after him as I've got the Clavis, and he's nothing but a scapegoat in H.J.'s plans to try and kill me. Now Lily on the other hand might bear something of a grudge. But it's up to her to deal with Harry as she sees fit."

Regulus knew that Lily would try and find some way of getting back at Harry if he survived. "I'm sure she will."

"As am I." Thomas smiled nastily. "Dinner will be at eight."

"I'll be back then." With that Regulus activated the portkey.

28th December 2009 - Grimmauld Square

After apparating in from Castrum House, Thomas headed upstairs to check on his wife where he found her awake for the first time since she'd been hurt, and he dismissed the nurse he'd hired to sit with her. "How are you feeling?"

"Very sore." Mione smiled wanly. "What I wouldn't give for five minutes alone with the man who did this to me."

Thomas told her that her wish wouldn't be possible. "I'm afraid you're a little too late as he's dead."

Mione was shocked. "How?"

"I killed him using a similar form of the curse he used on you." Thomas took Mione's hand. "The only major difference was that, unlike you, he was able to scream out his pain but I locked the spell so no-one else could lift it."

Mione put her free hand to her mouth. "Thomas, why?"

"Because he hurt you." Thomas said softly.

"But you'll end up in Azkaban." Mione responded tearfully.

Thomas shook his head. "Sirius has already signed off on my use of an illegal curse. He did the same for H.J., who used the killing curse on another Death Eater."

"Was anyone else hurt?" Mione asked anxiously.

Thomas briefly explained what had happened. "Cassandra is in Varsity Hospital, New York, and Harry is at St Mungo's."

"How are they?" Mione asked.

Thomas had received a note from Remus in response to his own. "Cassandra is being kept unconscious until later today but she's expected to make an almost full recovery apart from some scarring." Given the severity of her injuries, Thomas had been surprised that Cassandra had survived. "However, Harry took a turn for the worse yesterday, and he's slipped even deeper into the coma that he's been in since they first admitted him."

Mione started to cry, so Thomas wrapped his arms around her. "I'm afraid there's more. Cammie didn't make it back."

Mione lifted her head. "She's dead?"

Thomas explained about the note and its enclosures that H.J. had received. "There's going to be a memorial service for her on New Year's Eve."

Mione dropped her head and sobbed heavily against Thomas' chest. "She was only a baby. I hope that when they catch up with that bastard, they make him suffer for what he's done."

"I don't think you're alone in expressing that sentiment." Thomas knew that along with his wife, there would be plenty of others who would also like to make him pay. "I think you should try and get some more sleep. You won't do yourself any good crying like this. I'll get you a dreamless sleep potion."

Mione continued to cry as Thomas walked out of the room, bringing the nurse back in with him. "Take this, Mrs. Seville."

Mione did as she was asked, and was soon sleeping. Thomas pulled the covers up to her chin, kissed her and left.

Later that evening

Sirius waited anxiously for Leslie Worth to finish checking Cassandra over. "Well?"

Leslie smiled widely. "She's definitely coming out of it." He turned to the nurse who was sitting in the room with Cassandra. "I want another IV of painkilling potion for her."

A short time later, Cassandra finally regained consciousness and tried to sit up, only for the restraining spell that had been invoked to stop her injuries from being ripped open again, to hold her in place. Fear flooded her before she'd even opened her eyes. Sirius guessed she'd be frightened and immediately spoke to her. "Cassie, you're safe. You can open your eyes."

"Dad?" Cassandra slowly opened her eyes and saw that it was indeed Sirius. "Throat dry. Water."

Sirius looked at Leslie, who instructed both the nurse and Sirius. "She can be sat up now, Nurse. Sirius, just sips of water."

Sirius got up and grabbed the glass of water that was sitting on the other side of the bed. "Cassie, don't attempt to lean forward, I'll help you with this."

"Kay." Cassandra didn't feel any pain as she was carefully moved upright.

Sirius held the glass with a straw in it so that Cassandra could drink from it. Cassandra felt pure relief as the cold liquid soothed her throat. "Harry?"

"Harry is still unconscious." Sirius shared a look with Luna and Orion.

"What about Cammie?" Cassandra's head was now starting to clear as she shook off the vestiges of her sedation.

Leslie Worth tapped a vial in his hand, and the contents immediately vanished, reappearing in Cassandra's IV. "Calming potion. She can't take crying just yet."

Sirius swallowed. "I'm sorry, Cassie, but Cammie didn't make it."

"Oh no." Cassandra couldn't cry but she still needed comforting, and she looked miserably at Sirius.

Sirius turned to Leslie. "Can I hold her?"

Leslie nodded. "Please be careful though."

Sirius sat gingerly on the bed and put his arm around Cassandra. "I can't hold you any tighter as you're still pretty beat up, Cassie."

"He did it because I was me." Cassandra closed her eyes as she recalled what she'd gone through.

“Let’s not talk about it right now.” Sirius thought Cassandra was talking about being forced; something he didn’t want to discuss in front of Luna and his son. “Luna and Orion are here.”

“Honeymoon.” Cassandra yawned as she struggled to keep her eyes open.

Luna, who’d nagged and nagged, until they’d let her see her friend, carefully took Cassandra’s hand. “You’re far more important.”

“Love you.” Cassandra squeezed Luna’s hand. “Good friend.”

Sirius knew that she’d fallen asleep again as she suddenly relaxed, and he carefully slid off the bed taking care not to jolt his daughter. “Was there sedative in that calming potion?”

Leslie confirmed that there had been. “She’s still in poor shape, Sirius, so I’d prefer for her to sleep still as much as possible, and not to be fretting over Auror Sebastian and the little girl. She should wake up again in about six hours. You should get some rest yourself.”

Sirius, who hadn’t really left his daughter’s side except to change clothes and eat something, promptly transfigured his chair into a lounger. “I’ll sleep here tonight again.”

Luna wasn’t leaving now that she’d been let in, and so she did the same. “So will I.” Orion followed suit.

Leslie dimmed the lights and addressed the nurse. “Keep an eye on all four of them. If you need anything, call Nick if it’s not urgent. If it’s urgent, I’ll be sleeping in my office.” Wanting to keep an eye on Cassandra, Leslie himself had only popped home for a few hours on Christmas morning to see his wife, and had spent practically every hour since then in the hospital.

30th December 2004

When the two men reached Cassandra's room, she was awake, and from her color, she was obviously feeling much better. "Dad, Uncle Remus."

Sirius' face lit up. "Cassie, you look much better."

Cassandra felt better than she had. "I feel it." Her main concern though wasn't herself. "How's Harry, Dad?"

"I'm sorry, Cassie but he's continuing to deteriorate." Sirius admitted reluctantly.

Cassandra couldn't believe that she might lose Harry. "He can't die, Dad. Not now."

Sirius soothed his daughter, sitting down and holding her. "Craig's doing everything he can for Harry." Sirius didn't mention that there was little that Craig could do except monitor Harry and hope.

Cassandra wasn't satisfied with Sirius' response. "Dad, can I see him?"

Sirius shook his head, prompting tears from his daughter. "I'm sorry, Cassie, but neither of you are in any condition to be moved yet."

Cassandra leant against Sirius' chest as he cradled her. "When then?"

"Leslie's hopeful you'll be able to come home in a few days." Sirius kissed the top of Cassandra's head. "Mione contacted me yesterday to offer the use of the jet to bring you back, otherwise it would be even longer as you can't portkey or apparate for at least a week or more."

"You did say yes, didn't you?" Cassandra wanted nothing more than to get home and see Harry.

"I did." Sirius wanted to get Cassandra home as well, as he'd missed Christmas with his wife and son, as Faith hadn't been able to

travel, and he'd been unwilling to leave Cassandra while she was so ill. "Cassie, you do know that we won't be here tomorrow, don't you?"

"It's Cammie's memorial service, isn't it?" Cassandra wiped away the tears that were continuing to fall. "I wish I could be there."

"It's going to be a horrible day, Cassie." Sirius said softly. "I'm glad in some respects that you can't be. Luna and Orion will stay here with you, as I don't want you to be alone while Remus and I are gone."

"Give my love to H.J. and Hermione." Cassandra didn't know what else she could do. "And tell them that I'm sorry."

"I will." Sirius promised. "We're on our way to USAD now, so I'll see you on New Year's Day. I'll be flying over with Thomas."

"Dad, you don't have to do that." Cassandra protested.

"I want to." Sirius kissed his daughter again. "I'll see you then." He smiled at Luna and Orion. "Take care of her while I'm gone."

"We will." Luna promised. "And give the same message as Cassandra's to H.J. and Hermione from us. And tell Xander I'll see him on New Year's Day, and that I miss him."

Sirius was grateful to the girl who'd given up her honeymoon and her time with Xander to be with Cassandra. "I will, Luna, and thank you."

With that the two men left.

New Year's Day

After a ride in a Muggle ambulance, Cassandra found herself sitting up in a large bed, Luna and Orion sitting on either side of her as Thomas' jet left New York. "I can't wait to get home."

"Uncle Craig has a hospital room all set up for you." Orion could see his news didn't exactly thrill his sister. "But he said that it should only be for a few more days, and then you can come home."

“I just want to see Harry.” Cassandra knew that Harry’s condition hadn’t gotten any better.

Sirius stuck his head around the door. “I think you should let Cassandra get some sleep. This is going to be a long flight.”

“They’re okay, Dad.” Cassandra didn’t want to be alone.

Sirius turned to Orion. “If your sister starts to get tired, then out.”

“Okay, Dad.” Orion reassured Sirius.

The trio spent most of the trip talking amongst themselves, but eventually Orion and Luna left Cassandra alone, as she fell asleep a few hours before they were due to land.

Thomas was talking quietly with Sirius, and Orion and Luna were sitting at the back of the plane playing cards when Cassandra began screaming.

Everyone got up from where they were, and rushed into mid-section room, Sirius hurrying to wake his daughter. “Cassie, wake up.”

Cassandra gasped as she came to, tears starting to stream down her cheeks. “I thought I was back there.”

At the sight of the white face of the obviously terrified young woman, Thomas felt a rare pang of guilt, and he stepped out of the bedroom and went to collect a calming potion before returning. “Give her this.”

Sirius thanked Thomas, and administered the calming potion to Cassandra, who soon settled down. “I’ll sit with her now until we land.”

Everyone left Sirius and Cassandra alone. “Cassie, what was the nightmare about?”

Cassandra snuggled deeper into her father's arms, feeling safe while he was holding her. "I was back in that cell again, and he was... he was touching me."

Sirius tamped down his anger, and kept his voice calm, as he finally brought up the subject he hadn't wanted to talk about while his daughter had been so sick. "Cassie, he did more than touch you, didn't he?"

Cassandra realized what Sirius meant. "You think he raped me?"

Sirius nodded. "He didn't?"

Cassandra shook her head. "No. What made you think he did?"

Sirius felt relief surge through him as Cassandra said that she hadn't been forced, but that still left the question of exactly who Cassandra had had sex with. "Cassie, when you portkeyed in you were only wearing your underwear. Because of that, Healer Settle checked you over for signs of any sexual abuse. When she did, she found evidence that you'd been sexually active some time that day. Given the state of you, we obviously thought that it had been non-consensual."

Cassandra closed her eyes. "Oh Merlin."

Sirius prompted Cassandra. "So you had consensual sex with someone that day?"

Cassandra was aware that she was finally going to have to come clean about Harry. "Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me that you were seeing someone?" Sirius asked.

"I couldn't because I knew you'd disapprove, and..." Cassandra began, only for Sirius to interrupt her.

“You’re right that I’m not thrilled at the thought of you sleeping with someone outside of matrimony but you could have at least told me that you were dating.” Sirius hadn’t believed that he was that unapproachable.

Cassandra knew that Sirius was hurt that she hadn’t confided in him. “Dad, I was going to tell you eventually if I thought it was going to go somewhere.”

“Which it obviously isn’t as he hasn’t even attempted to see how you are, has he?” Sirius was disappointed for his daughter.

“No, he hasn’t.” Cassandra conceded. “But that’s only because he can’t.”

Sirius immediately jumped to the wrong conclusion, both as to why Cassandra hadn’t told him she was dating, and why her boyfriend hadn’t visited her. “Okay, so perhaps he couldn’t afford a portkey to see you but he could have written. I wouldn’t have condemned him just because he’s not well off.”

“No, Dad, it’s not that he doesn’t have money, it’s because...” Cassandra began only for Sirius to interrupt her again.

“Please tell me he’s not married.” Sirius begged.

“Dad, he’s not married.” Cassandra wished Sirius would just let her get the words out.

“Then why the hell didn’t he contact you?” Sirius thought the man was definitely not worthy of his daughter.

Cassandra swallowed hard before giving Sirius the reason why. “Because he’s in a coma, Dad.”

Sirius’ face darkened as he immediately realized who Cassandra was talking about. “You’ve been sleeping with Harry?”

“I’ve been dating Harry.” Cassandra didn’t want Sirius to think that it was just about sex. “I started seeing him the day I was sent home from USAD.”

Sirius gently let go of Cassandra and got to his feet. “I’m going to kill that son of a bitch.”

Frightened for Harry, Cassandra grabbed her Dad’s hand. “What are you going to do, Dad? Harry’s not able to defend himself while he’s in a coma.”

In his anger, Sirius had forgotten that he couldn’t take it out on Harry, and he turned a disappointed face on his daughter. “Cassie, how could you? You’ve been seeing Harry for less than a month, and you slept with him.”

“Yes, I did.” Cassandra decided not to mention that she’d been sleeping with Harry for the entire duration of their relationship. “Dad, I’ve not hidden the fact that I’ve wanted a relationship with Harry for a long time but as I told you before, he refused up until recently.”

“Something he should have kept on doing.” Sirius snapped. “And as I tried to tell you before, he’s never going to love you like you love him, Cassie.”

“Dad, he cares about me.” Cassandra protested. “Even more than he cared about his wife and Tonks.”

“That doesn’t exactly say much.” Sirius felt a spasm of guilt at the distress that crossed his daughter’s face at his words. “Cassie, you know I want more for you than a relationship with someone who doesn’t love you.”

“And I want Harry.” Cassandra countered. “Even if he doesn’t love me.”

Sirius really wasn’t happy about the relationship. “I’m not sure I want you seeing Harry again.”

"Dad, that's not going to happen." Cassandra wasn't about to give Harry up.

"Cassie, he's no good for you." Sirius argued. "He's got a bloody awful history with..."

Cassandra interrupted. "'I don't care about his history with women. Dad, the only reason that Harry's lying in a coma right now is because he came after me."

"Harry's in that condition because Cammie was his niece, you were my daughter and it was his job." Sirius hadn't realized that, even though Harry had gone for Cammie, his first concern had been for Cassandra.

"Dad, you've got no idea what he did for me." Cassandra knew that Harry hadn't just come after her because she was Sirius' daughter and it had been job.

"Then tell me." Sirius countered. "I want to know what Harry did for you."

"After we land, bring your pensieve to the hospital, and I'll show you." Cassandra wasn't looking forward to showing her Dad what she'd gone through, but she wasn't willing to let him denigrate Harry, especially after their shared experience.

Sirius knew it that it was going to be difficult for Cassandra, as up until then, she hadn't really said much about what had happened as it had been too upsetting for her. He therefore made an effort to calm down. "In that case, I promise I'll reserve my judgment until then."

"Thanks Dad." Cassandra held out her hand, a worried look on her face. "Will you still stay with me until we land?"

"Of course I will." Sirius was annoyed by what Cassandra had revealed but given her condition, he wasn't able to stay mad at his daughter. "Cassie, I'm not angry with you; just disappointed."

"I know, Dad." Cassandra curled back up to Sirius as he put his arm around her. "But you'll see what I mean about Harry caring for me after you see the memory."

"As I said, I'll reserve judgment." Sirius kissed Cassandra on the top of her head. "We've still got an hour before we land, so try and get some sleep. I promise I'll stay with you."

Cassandra felt safe, and within a few minutes, she'd fallen back to sleep.

Next chapter: Sirius and Remus view Cassandra's memories. Remus and H.J. make a pact that they don't share with Sirius.

Chapter 42: The Suspect

2nd January 2005 – St. Mungo's

Sirius looked contemplatively at the pensieve. Inside it were the memories that Cassandra had provided. "I'm not sure I'm ready for this."

"Dad, perhaps you should wait." Cassandra suggested, alarmed at how pale Sirius had gone, and that was before he'd even entered the pensieve.

Remus placed a comforting hand on his friend's arm. "Cassandra's right. If you're not up to this, you should wait."

"No, let's do this." Not giving himself any longer to dwell on it, Sirius plunged into the pensieve, taking Remus with him.

As the memory unfolded, Sirius found himself gripping Remus' arm as Dominus threatened his daughter, and Harry begged for her.

"I think he cares more for her than you realize, Sirius." Remus had seen the despair in Harry's eyes as he'd stood chained, unable to intervene as Cassandra was taunted by Dominus. "He was going to give up his soul to serve Dominus if it meant saving Cassandra."

Sirius couldn't deny that Harry obviously cared, but Sirius still felt unhappy about the relationship. "I know but I'm still not entirely thrilled by the idea of him dating my daughter." He sighed. "We'd best watch the next memory."

Remus began it, and the two men watched the memory play out, starting with Cassandra being dragged away from a kicking and screaming Cammie, and being manhandled into a room where chains hanging in the center of it were attached to her wrists and ankles, forcing her to remain upright.

Sirius stopped the memory. "I'm not sure I can watch this, Remus."

"We need to work out who did this to her, Sirius." Remus placed his arm around his friend's shoulders. "But we can take it slowly."

"Thanks." Sirius didn't pull away from his friend, drawing strength from the comfort he was providing. "I'm ready."

Remus continued the memory.

23rd December 2004

Cassandra pulled at her chains. "What do you want from me?"

"Absolutely nothing." One of the two men who'd helped to secure her told her. He then left the room.

However, one man remained. "He might not have anything he wants from you but I do. You owe me."

Cassandra recoiled at the venom in the man's voice. "What have I ever done to you?"

"I hate you." The man revealed as he walked around Cassandra. "Daddy's little girl."

Cassandra guessed that he had some sort of grudge against her family. "You know nothing about me."

"Wrong." The man almost spat the word at Cassandra. "You finished top in your classes at Hogwarts; you completed the Auror training course in eight months; and I know you're fucking Sebastian."

Cassandra winced at the language, and denied the man's claim. "You don't know anything about Harry and me."

The man continued to walk around her. "How else did you manage to get through Auror training so quickly if you weren't fucking him?"

"Because I worked for it." Cassandra snarled at the man, fear driving her anger. "I didn't need to sleep with Harry to earn it."

“I disagree.” The man grabbed Cassandra’s chin. “I wonder how that sanctimonious bastard will feel when he finds out that I’ve taken what’s his.”

Garnering the man’s meaning, Cassandra blanched. “Take your hands off me.”

Releasing her chin, the man laughed, and walked around behind Cassandra, one arm encircling her from behind. Cassandra bent her head intent on driving it backwards into his face but she felt a hand tangle in her hair, and roughly hold her steady. “We can’t be having that, Black.” The man then yanked Cassandra’s hair hard, making her cry out in pain, before reaching for the zip of her dress.

Cassandra screamed and struggled in the chains but could do nothing as the man unzipped her strapless dress, and it slithered down to the ground before the man vanished it. “Get your fucking hands off me.”

The man ran one of his hands over Cassandra’s stomach until it was cupping her breast. “I don’t this so. You see Black, I’m going to do whatever I want to.”

Cassandra tried to pull away from the man’s touch, as his hand began to move lower. “Please don’t do this.”

“Not so high and mighty now, are we?” The man lowered his head to whisper in her ear. “I like hearing you beg.”

Cassandra stiffened, before straightening up as she decided that she wasn’t going to add to her attacker’s sick gratification by pleading with him. “Well I hope you enjoyed my begging because it’s the last time I’m going to be doing. So if you’re going to rape me, just get it over and done with.”

“All in good time.” The man withdrew his hand and pulled out his wand. “First I want to see you suffer. And believe me, Black, you’ll soon be begging again.”

Hearing the first syllable of the Cruciatus curse, Cassandra tensed up. The man watched as she screamed and writhed in the chains, blood pouring from her wrists and ankles where she struggled to escape from the pain, but she still refused to plead with him. As the man dropped the curse, Cassandra sucked air into her lungs. "I'm still not begging."

The man walked back around to face Cassandra. "That's just for starters, Black. Trust me. You'll be begging before this is over."

Twenty minutes later, the man had proved himself right as Cassandra ended up pleading with him to stop. Only then did he halt what he was doing. "I told you you'd be begging."

Cassandra's arms felt as if they were being pulled out of her sockets as she sagged in the chains, her face and back bloody and wet. Her throat felt as if it was on fire, and she was aware that the Lacero curses he'd used on her, had ripped her stomach apart, causing pain to lance through her every time she took a breath, or moved. "It's easy to make someone beg when you're holding a wand, you fucking coward."

The man backhanded her. "Watch your mouth, Black." The man then walked around behind Cassandra, his hands running over her body, before one slid inside her bra, squeezing her breast painfully. "Do you know what's going to happen to you now?"

Cassandra couldn't answer, as revulsion and fear filled her.

The man answered the question for her. "Now I'm going to fuck you, Black."

Suddenly the door opened, and the Death Eater released Cassandra, bowing as he did so. "Dominus."

Dominus stood in the doorway, taking in the sight in front of him. "Unchain her."

The man released the chains, and Cassandra collapsed onto the floor. "I was just..."

"I know exactly what you were just about to do." Dominus gestured to the man behind him. "Check her over. I don't want her dying." He then turned to the man who'd tortured Cassandra. "I said that she wasn't to be touched. Crucio."

The man screamed and writhed on the floor for what seemed like an eternity until Dominus released the spell. "Clean up your mess, then get up and get out of my sight. Disobey my orders again, and next time I'll kill you."

Present Time

As the memory ended, Sirius pulled out of the pensieve, before kneeling down and throwing up on the floor. "Sorry."

Cassandra was horrified. "Dad?"

"I'll be alright." Sirius didn't look at Cassandra.

Remus' eyes glistened amber in the lights of the hospital room as he cleaned up the mess on the floor. "Stay where you are for a minute, Sirius."

Cassandra wished she could get up. "Dad, please look at me."

Aware that Cassandra would think he was ashamed of her if he didn't, Sirius glanced up. "Cassie, it's just the shock. It's nothing you've done."

Cassandra wasn't quite sure she believed him. "Dad, I'm so sorry. I should have done something; tried harder."

Sirius shakily got up, and moved over to the bed to hug his daughter. "Don't you dare apologize, Cassie. He pushed you until you broke. I'd have given up long before you did."

"I don't believe you." Cassandra sniffled as Sirius held her. "You'd never have done that."

"Yes I would." Sirius had been surprised at Cassandra's fortitude. "But I'm glad you held out as long as you did."

Remus knew what would have happened if she hadn't. "So am I but when I find out who do that to you, I'm going to fulfill Dominus' wish about locking me up in a cage with someone but obviously it won't be you. And once inside it, I'm going to show that bastard who's done this to you how to beg."

Cassandra could see that Remus was extremely angry. "Uncle Remus, he's not worth going to Azkaban for."

"But you are." Remus swung round and releasing his anger, smashed a hole into the wall.

"You've really got to stop doing that." Sirius knew that Remus had done the same at Varsity. Getting to his feet, he pulled out his wand, and repaired the wall and the abrasions that now marred his friend's hand. "Or I'm going to be footing the bill."

Remus gave a half smile as he realized that the slight humor meant that Sirius was trying to get himself under control again. "Sorry."

"I need to do something." Sirius turned to his daughter. "Will you be alright alone for a little while?"

"I will." Cassandra smiled encouragingly at Sirius.

"I'll be back shortly." With that Sirius headed out of the door, Remus following him.

As soon as he was outside the room, Sirius' control disappeared, and he snarled angrily. "I hate that Cassandra thinks it's her fault, and I hate that I've got to be grateful to Dominus for saving her from that bastard."

"It's Dominus' fucking fault that she ended up there in the first place." Remus pointed out. "You owe him nothing."

"Logically I know that, but if he hadn't interceded, you know what that man would have done to her." With that, Sirius sat down on the floor and buried his face in his hands, trying to overcome his tears and failing. Remus sat down next to his friend, pulling him into his arms as Sirius cried for what his daughter had had to go through.

When Sirius pulled back, he wiped his eyes on his sleeve. "Thanks. I thought I'd done all my crying by now."

"It's hard to watch something like that, and know you couldn't do anything to help." Remus ran his hand up and down Sirius' arm as he comforted his friend. "We'd better get back inside before Cassandra begins to worry. We also need to try and work out who did this. It's obviously someone she knows."

Cassandra could see that Sirius had been crying when he came back into the room. "I'm sorry, Dad."

"Cassie, I've already said don't be." Sirius squeezed her hand. "Right now, we need to concentrate on finding out who did this to you."

Cassandra reiterated what Remus had just said. "Dad, I'm sure that whoever did that to me, knows me and Harry."

Sirius nodded. "Remus thinks the same, and we're going to find him."

"But how?" Cassandra had no idea where to start. "He was wearing a mask."

"You can't have made that many enemies." Remus pointed out.

Sirius was by now thinking more clearly. "We need to make a list of anyone who might be potentially harboring a grudge against you or Harry."

Cassandra began to think of anyone who might dislike her. "What about the girls who were involved in the bet at the USAD?"

"The girls at USAD did everything they could to try to find you and Harry when you disappeared." Remus informed her. "And your attacker was definitely a man."

Cassandra swallowed hard. "In that case, how about Duncan Starr? He definitely wouldn't like me or Harry. And he was dismissed a few days after Harry left for insubordination." Lucy had told Cassandra about her brother's dismissal.

"Do you think he'd have gone this far?" Remus asked, not ever having met the man.

"He was willing to use his abilities to get me to sleep with him." Cassandra reminded Remus, who had been told by Sirius about the incident.

"And I don't think he's harboring any fluffy feelings towards either Harry or Cassandra after what's happened, so he's a definite for the list." Sirius remarked.

"But that still doesn't mean he'd go as far as your attacker did." Despite his anger, Remus still acted as the voice of reason. "And if he had, he wouldn't have had to force Cassandra; he could have just used his abilities."

"I don't think that he really gave a damn whether she was willing or not." Sirius pointed out. "If it was him, then he was more interested in hurting her for what she'd done to him. I think I'm going to speak to Lucy Viking. She told Harry that her brother has violent tendencies."

Cassandra was pale. "Do you really think he did this?"

"I don't know, Cassie." Sirius kissed his daughter on the cheek. "But I have to start somewhere, and right now it's with the most obvious suspect."

“We’ll be back later.” Remus went to open the door, only for Cassandra to stop them. “I want to see Harry before you go. Starr can wait.”

Sirius reluctantly agreed to it. “I’ll ask Craig to take you upstairs.”

Ten minutes later, Cassandra’s bed was wheeled into Harry’s room, and placed next to his bed so that she could hold Harry’s hand. “Can I have some time alone with him, please?”

Remus could see that, even though he knew Sirius wanted to pursue his investigation about Starr, Sirius was reluctant to leave. “Come on, Sirius. Harry’s out cold; he’s not going to be chasing Cassandra around the room anytime soon.”

Acknowledging he was being ridiculous, Sirius finally left.

Ten minutes later, Lucy found herself standing in Sirius’ office, not quite sure of what she’d done wrong; Sirius’ earlier warning still incredibly vivid in her mind. “You asked to see me, Sir?”

“Sit down, Lucy.” Sirius made it very clear that he wasn’t disciplining her by smiling slightly. “I need to talk to you about your brother.”

“What’s he done, Sir?” Lucy asked in a resigned voice.

“I’m going to show you something that you’re probably going to find very disturbing, but I need you to tell me if you think it might be your brother.” Sirius stood up. “Come here.”

Lucy let Sirius take her hand, feeling a little strange with her commanding officer holding it like that. “Where are we going?”

“To see a friend of mine.” Sirius apparated them both to the Academy, as he’d decided that he wanted to conduct the viewing somewhere a little less intimidating than in his office, and Remus had immediately offered to let him use his apartment at the Watchers’ Academy.

Lucy looked round. "Where are we?"

Remus answered her. "The Watchers' Academy." He held out his hand. "I'm Remus Lupin. Call me Remus."

"Lucy." Lucy smiled a little shyly; she only knew Remus from his photos in the wizarding tabloids. "You're the head of the Council, aren't you?"

"I am." Remus led the two of them over to the table. "We're all set."

Lucy noticed plastic on the floor surrounding the table. "What's that for?"

"I was sick after seeing the memory." Sirius glared at his friend. "I think Remus is making sure that I don't make a mess of his floor if I repeat it."

"Duncan's not dead, is he?" Lucy asked shakily.

"No, he's not." Sirius held off saying that he would be if it turned out to be him as he suspected. "As I've just said, this isn't going to be nice to watch."

"I'm ready, Sir." Lucy said in a firm voice.

"Let's do this then." Sirius took Lucy's hand again, and pulled her into the pensieve.

Lucy gasped as she recognized a chained and almost naked Cassandra. "Oh Merlin. This is what happened to Cassandra when she was kidnapped, isn't it?"

Sirius placed a steadying hand on Lucy's shoulder. "Yes. But it's the man who's torturing her I'm interested in."

Lucy drew her horrified gaze from Cassandra to the cloaked and masked man. "But that could be anyone."

“Will you watch the memory for me?” Sirius asked plaintively.

Lucy felt nauseous as she suddenly realized that Sirius suspected that the man in the frozen memory was her brother, and her voice fell to barely above a whisper. “Yes, Sir.”

Sirius began the memory, putting a comforting arm around Lucy’s shoulders as she forced herself to watch her friend being tortured.

Suddenly Lucy gasped, and put a hand to her mouth. Sirius recognized the signs and pulled them both out of the pensieve. Remus had already anticipated Lucy’s reaction, and shoved a bowl under her head, as Sirius supported the young woman as she vomited.

When she'd finished, Remus handed over a glass of water. “Swirl it around your mouth and spit it out.” Lucy automatically did what he said, before taking the next glass that was shoved into her hand and drinking it as instructed. She shuddered as brandy burned its way down her throat.

Sirius led her over to the sofa. “Lucy, is it him?”

Lucy nodded. “I think so, Sir.”

Remus sat down on the other side of her. “What makes you think so?”

Lucy explained what had upset her. “Duncan has got a way of twirling his wand through his fingers, exactly as the man in the memory just did. I can show you a memory of Duncan doing it if you want to see it.”

Sirius did want to see it very much. “Please.”

Lucy provided the memory, and Sirius left her alone with Remus to view the memory.

Remus could sense horror, disgust and despair coming from Lucy. “I’m really sorry, Lucy.”

“I knew he had a temper but I didn’t think he’d ever do something like kidnap Cassandra and do that to her.” Lucy felt too numb to cry.

“He didn’t take her; someone else did. If it's him, then Duncan just used it to his advantage.” Remus watched Sirius emerge, his face set in a grim line. “It’s him, isn’t it?”

Sirius nodded. “Like Lucy, I believe it might be. But I’m going to need to question him.”

“He’s impervious to Veritaserum and Legilimency.” Lucy reminded Sirius.

Sirius had forgotten. “Dammit. He’s never going to own up to doing this, and I can’t convict a man on the way he holds a wand.”

Remus had an idea which he decided to keep to himself, and instead gave Sirius an alternative choice. “We’ll have to monitor him then. I’ll ask a couple of the Slayers who live in New York to patrol close to where he lives, and you can ask Michaela to do the same with several Aurors.”

“There's only a very slim possibility that he’ll do anything to incriminate himself.” Sirius paced up and down the floor. “There has to be some other way of getting him to talk.”

“Mum could probably do it, Sir.” Lucy blurted out. “Particularly if you show her that memory.”

Sirius decided to go with Lucy’s suggestion. “Lucy, will you talk to your mother for me?”

“Yes, Sir.” Lucy nodded.

Sirius pulled a coin out of his pocket and tapped it. “We’ll travel to USAD, and then you’ll have to apparate me.”

“Yes, Sir.” Lucy responded again.

Sirius picked up the pensieve. "Hold onto my arm."

Lucy wrapped her hands around Sirius' arm and he operated the portkey.

Tamsin Bradstock was shocked when Lucy led someone she recognized from his pictures into her sitting room. Putting her son over her shoulder, she got up. "Commander Black."

"It's just Sirius." Sirius held out his hand.

Tamsin shook it. "What can I do for you, Sirius?"

"Is Duncan here?" Sirius needed to find out before he said anything.

Tamsin's face fell. "I haven't seen him since a few days before Christmas. He just packed up some things, said something about staying with some friends in Albany, and left. I received a birthday card a few days ago but I haven't heard anything else from him."

"Do you have any idea of where I can find him?" Sirius asked.

Tamsin shook her head. "I tried the two people I know in Albany and he's not with them. Can I ask why you want to see Duncan?"

"Let me take Michael, Mum." Lucy held out her hands for her little brother.

Knowing it had to be bad if Lucy didn't want her holding Michael, Tamsin passed her son over. "What's he done?"

"I want to question him about the recent kidnapping and attempted murder of my daughter." Sirius was surprised that Tamsin, although paling, didn't seem unduly surprised. "I know you can't have anything to do with it, but you don't seem surprised."

"It's not that I'm not shocked; I am. But Duncan has a long history of getting in trouble." Tamsin indicated that Sirius should sit down. "Ever

since he was old enough to walk he's been more than a handful. Lucy won't remember this but we had to take him out of one elementary school for bullying other children. He seemed to settle down for a while but there have always been problems with him on and off. When he joined USAD with Lucy, I thought he'd gotten past that but then he was almost kicked out for fighting during his first year. I interceded and asked Chief Bradford to give him another chance. After that he kept his nose clean, apart from his womanizing."

"Did you know that he used his abilities on my daughter prior to the incident I need to speak to him about?" Sirius put the pensieve down at his feet.

"Lucy told me before she left for London, and I can only apologize for my son's actions." Tamsin had torn into Duncan when he'd come home from USAD. Tamsin glanced down. "Can I ask, what's the pensieve for?"

Sirius explained its presence. "It's Cassandra's memory of her recent experience. Lucy reviewed it for me and she believes that Duncan might be responsible. I was going to ask you to view it and speak to your son if you feel the same way. But given that he's fled, I'm not sure that it's entirely necessary now."

"May I observe the memory anyway?" Tamsin had to be sure that it really was Duncan.

"It's not pleasant viewing." Sirius warned her.

"I've seen some pretty unpleasant things in my time." Tamsin got to her feet. "Lucy, watch Michael for me."

Tamsin and Sirius entered the pensieve, and Sirius showed her the part that Lucy had become ill during. Tamsin stopped the memory. "I can't say for certain but there's a very good chance that it's him. If it turns out to be the case, then I'll make the necessary recompense to your daughter."

“That won’t be necessary.” Sirius refused the offer. “Cassandra wouldn’t accept it from you, as she wouldn’t want you to suffer for what your son might have done. Neither would I.”

“If you find him, I’ll help you but I can’t guarantee that my abilities will work on him. They did when he was younger but as he grew older, he began to grow resistant to me as I did with my father.” Tamsin took several deep breaths as she centered herself. “I always hoped that he’d be more like my Dad, and that he wouldn’t turn out like his father, but it looks as though that wish has gone by the way.” Tamsin then explained about her first husband. “My first husband died when he was staying over with Lucy’s parents. He was there because, as the pureblood in our relationship, I was able to throw him out of our marital home for hitting me. The first night he was there, a potions explosion occurred, and it killed everyone except for Lucy. I didn’t even know he’d gone there until after the accident.”

“You didn’t have to tell me that.” Sirius said gently.

“I’d rather say it here where Lucy can’t hear. She’d get upset. Lucy’s an angel and doesn’t deserve to be exposed to something like this.” Tamsin placed a hand on Sirius’ arm. “And while I’m here, I’d also like to thank you for accepting Lucy’s transfer. I know about Duncan’s bullying, and Colin and I have lost count of the times we’ve disciplined Duncan over it. I thought it had stopped until the incident with your daughter took place.”

“You can’t be responsible for what your children do, and you can’t watch them every minute of the day. I know that only too well.” Sirius smiled ruefully as he thought about Cassandra. “We’d better get out of here.”

Lucy looked worriedly at her mother as the pair emerged. “Mum?”

“You might be right, Lucy.” Tamsin held out her arms. “Let me have Michael back, as I believe Sirius is ready to go.”

Lucy kissed Michael and hugged her mother. “I love you, Mum.”

“I love you too, Lucy.” Tamsin kissed her daughter on the cheek. “I’ll see you soon.”

Sirius shook hands with Tamsin. “Let me know if you hear anything from your son.”

“I will.” Tamsin stood back as the two disappeared. Only after putting Michael into his playpen, did she break down and weep.

St. Mungo’s – the next day

When the two men entered Harry’s room to talk to Cassandra, they found that she was sound asleep.

“She knows that she’s not supposed to be moving on her own.” Sirius was annoyed that Cassandra had obviously crawled across the two beds as she was now tucked up under Harry’s arm, with her head on his chest; her fingers clutching his pajama top as if her life depended on it.

“Do you want me to move her?” Remus offered.

“If you would.” Sirius was worried what would happen if Harry lashed out, even though he knew it was unlikely, and that Cassandra had probably slept like that all night.

When Remus attempted to pick his goddaughter up, Cassandra protested in her sleep and clutched more tightly to Harry. “What should I do? I don’t want to yank her off him.”

“Let me try.” Sirius whispered quietly. “Cassie, let go of him.” Cassandra didn’t appear to hear Sirius, and kept on sleeping.

“Sirius, just enlarge the bed so that she doesn’t fall off, and cover her over.” Remus suggested. “She obviously wants to stay with Harry.”

Sirius carried out what Remus had suggested, and he stood looking down at the couple. “Do you really think he really cares for her?”

Remus nodded. "I do. Sirius, there's something you should know. I'm seeing Buffy Summers."

Sirius' mouth fell open. "You're joking, right?"

Remus shook his head. "She's the person I wouldn't tell you about when we were at the pub."

"Okay." Sirius still didn't get what Buffy had to do with their conversation. "So why are you telling me now?"

Remus explained. "Sirius, when Harry went after Cassandra he didn't expect to come back at all. When Buffy asked why he was walking into what was so obviously a trap, Harry told her that it was because Cammie was his niece, and Cassandra was the most important person in his life."

"And you're only telling me this now?" Sirius couldn't believe Remus hadn't told him earlier.

"Buffy only told me last night." Remus revealed. "Hence my telling you about her and me now, and the same with Harry's comments. Sirius, I don't just think that Harry cares for Cassandra. I think he's in love with her, even if he doesn't realize it or doesn't want to face it. After what happened with Mione, I think he's afraid to let anyone in again."

After what Remus had just told him, Sirius reluctantly found himself agreeing with Remus. "That might be but when he comes round, I'm still going to be having a talk with him, Remus."

Remus smiled. "I wouldn't expect anything else from you. Now let's leave these two alone, and get on with arranging those surveillance teams."

"You don't think we'll find him, do you?" Sirius asked.

"I really don't know, Sirius." Remus had a feeling that his girls would track down the missing culprit before the USAD Aurors did, as he believed that Starr had fled to the Muggle world. "But I'm going to keep searching until I find him."

With that the two men left the hospital room. As they did, Cassandra opened up one eye, smiled and settled back down next to Harry.

22nd January 2005

Sirius was exhausted. In addition to a staff shortage and covering his own duties, he was also covering Harry's, which meant teaching Harry's classes as well. He called out in a resigned voice as a knock sounded at the door. "Come in."

Cassandra poked her head around the door. "I just thought I'd see how you were doing before I went onto night duty."

"I'm about to lose my mind to be truthful. Come in." Sirius got up and hugged Cassandra who, even though she was staying with him and Faith, he'd seen little of as she was on night duties, and he always seemed to be in work.

"I've come to offer to help you now that my night duties are coming to an end." Cassandra kissed Sirius' cheek. "I'll cover Harry's classes until he's back on his feet. You can't keep doing it, and we've got too many Aurors out with Muggle flu for you to be spending your time in the classroom."

"You're supposed to be on the Muggle investigation team on Thursday." Sirius reminded her.

Cassandra was well aware of that, and also that the Muggle investigation team were the source of the Muggle flu. "Dad, I can speak freely?"

Sirius shrugged. "Why not?"

“Dad, this is ridiculous. You’re burning the candle at both ends; Faith is upset that she doesn’t see you, and she’s about to give birth; Siri keeps asking where you are; and I never see you even though we both work in the same building and currently live in the same house.” Cassandra laid everything out. “Dad, I’m more than qualified academically to teach Harry’s classes, and you need my help, so I want to do that instead of joining the Muggle investigation team. The team is still going to be there when Harry returns, and hopefully they’ll be minus the Muggle flu by the time he does.”

Sirius smiled at Cassandra. “You really are becoming quite forceful aren’t you?”

“I’ve realized that I can’t always rely on other people, and that sometimes I have to just depend on myself to do what’s right or what’s best.” Cassandra leant against Sirius’ desk. “And I think right now that it’s best I cover Harry’s classes. You know I have no real interest in the investigation team but I do know that I can teach, even if it’s not my favorite thing. Let me help, Dad.”

Sirius hugged his daughter again. “I’ll ask Alasdair to take over the physical aspects of the lessons on a Friday afternoon but you can take Harry’s morning classes for the rest of the week.”

“I’ve got all of Harry’s notes and I’ve read through them while I’ve been on nights.” Cassandra became enthusiastic as she realized that Sirius was going to agree with what she wanted. “So I’m ready.”

“Who’s on night duty tonight?” Sirius enquired.

“Julianne Solace is on the rota, and Trainee Channing is on punishment duty like me, thanks to you.” Cassandra grinned at her father.

“Tell them that you won’t be on tonight or the start next week as I’ve found something else I need you to do.” Sirius ordered. “Then you and I are leaving to go home, see my wife and your brother, and have a family meal together.”

Cassandra's face lit up. "I'll be right back."

Monday lunchtime

Cassandra whistled happily to herself as she packed up her things as Sirius came into the room. "Hi, Dad."

"Hi, Cassie." Sirius looked round before kissing Cassandra on the cheek. "So how did it go?"

"Great." Cassandra's face showed how happy she was. "Then again I think that might be because you weren't teaching the students anymore."

Sirius knew that he'd been more than a little short and tough with the students. "Don't go too easy on them."

"Oh I won't." Cassandra grinned wickedly at her father. "I've already assigned a couple of nights on desk duty for failing to call me 'Ma'am'. I thought it would make up for my not being there."

Sirius laughed. "They thought you were going to be all friendly and a pushover, didn't they?"

"Yes, but they soon came unstuck." Cassandra shrank her bag and slipped it into her pocket. "They seem to forget that I've learnt from you and Harry."

"More fool them." Sirius held out his hand. "Let's go to your office."

"My office?" Cassandra's face was a picture.

Sirius apparated them both to a small and sparse office. "As you're going to be teaching for a while, I decided that you need somewhere to make your notes, and review what you're going to do. It's up to you how you decorate it. Harry's office is next door, and mine is two doors up."

“Wasn’t this a storage closet?” Cassandra knew what had been next to Harry’s office.

“It was but it’s obviously been enlarged, and there’s a bathroom through that door.” Sirius pointed it out. “The storage closet has been moved across the hallway to a small but formerly empty space.”

Cassandra then noticed the lunch that was laid out on the table. “Is that for us?”

“It is.” Sirius pulled out Cassandra’s chair for her, before sitting down as well. “Cassie, as you’re more than familiar with the paperwork that comes through this office, I’ve decided that in addition to covering Harry’s morning lessons, I want you to take over some of the simpler aspects of both mine and his jobs. This will free me up to deal with the more complicated matters that I’ve got piling up.”

Cassandra couldn’t believe it. “I’d love the challenge, Dad.”

“I thought so.” Sirius forked some of the cold salmon into his mouth and swallowed it before continuing. “Now, what I’m looking for is...”

11th February 2005

Remus picked up the telephone. “Remus Lupin.”

“We’ve got the package you’ve been looking for.” Buffy’s voice sounded almost as clear as if she’d been standing next to him. “No injuries, except to him.”

“Make sure he’s kept where he can’t get out, and that he’s been totally disarmed, and under no circumstances let him touch you with his bare hands.” Remus debated telling Sirius and decided against it. He wasn’t willing to take the risk that Tamsin’s abilities would actually work on Starr, and he wanted the truth to come out about his goddaughter.

“It’s already been done.” Buffy assured him. “So I’ll see you and H.J. on the 23rd at the house.”

“I’ll send you a portkey by owl.” Remus promised, before softening his voice. “Buffy, thanks for doing this for me, and for going back to the States for a while.”

“After what’s happened, I understand, Remus.” Buffy assured him. “How is Xander?”

“He’s getting better.” Remus hadn’t expected Xander to be so upset about Cammie’s death but Xander had taken quite a liking to the little girl. “And I’ve decided that I’m not going to send him and Luna to San Francisco at all, and that they’re going to stay here. They’ve actually moved into Darcy Cottage as H.J. has moved back into his old house with Hermione.”

“So H.J.’s not returning to Hogwarts?” Buffy asked. “I thought he was just taking a month off.”

Remus went to shake his head then realized that Buffy couldn’t see. “No. Losing Cammie like that has made him realize that he isn’t concentrating on what he should be. So he’s said he won’t return until he’s killed Dominus, so Mara Hooch has agreed to continue to stay on to help James.” Remus then changed the subject as he made a snap decision. “Actually instead of waiting until the 23rd to see you, are you doing anything this weekend?”

“Not a thing.” Buffy had intended to go shopping but it was nothing that couldn’t wait.

“How about I portkey over in a little while and stay until Sunday then.” Remus knew with Mione away from the office on an extended vacation that Thomas had demanded she take, he shouldn’t be playing hooky but he needed a break.

“I’ll see you shortly then.” With that Buffy rang off.

H.J. heard a pop in the hallway and walked out. “Remus, what brings you here?”

“Buffy has what we’ve been looking for.” Remus didn’t say what it was in case Hermione was listening. “So are you still interested?”

H.J. smiled unpleasantly. “Most definitely.”

“Good.” Remus handed over a portkey which H.J. slipped into his pocket. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m off to New York for the weekend.”

“I’ll see you on the agreed date then.” H.J. shook Remus' hand, before stepping away.

“I’ll be there.” Remus then operated his portkey which would take him to JFK Airport. As he wasn’t on official Watchers’ Council business, he was unable to bypass Customs, and he reluctantly waited to clear them before heading for the apparition point, and then on to his girlfriend’s temporary home.

Next Chapter: Remus and H.J. hold an unorthodox interrogation. Rupert has to reveal what he’s been holding back.

Chapter 43: Confession

9th February 2005

Castrum House

Thomas touched the shoulder of the Death Eater standing to the right of him. "You may go." He then turned to Rupert. "Come with me."

Rupert followed Thomas from the dais, and out into the small antechamber behind it. Thomas then placed his hand on Rupert's arm, and apparated them both to his sitting room. "I want to know what progress you've made in finding the final link in my puzzle."

Rupert knew that he couldn't put off telling Thomas any longer; not if he wanted to live anyway. "I've managed to track down the last known place where the stone was supposed to have been kept by Dixon Jackson, but I've drawn a blank after that."

"And the last known place was?" Thomas knew that this time Rupert was telling the truth.

"Jackson's summer cottage in the Florida keys. I'll owl you the details." Rupert revealed what he'd known for months. "I've been there but found nothing."

"I'll go myself." Thomas decided, as he removed his mask. "I also wanted to speak to you about the Cartouches. I see that the date for the display to start at the British Museum has been changed to March 11th, so I want you to visit the Museum during the weekend it begins, to ascertain what warding they have in place. You can then decide what wards of our own we need."

"Of course." Rupert waited expectantly but when Thomas didn't say anything else, he made to depart. "I'll take my leave then."

"Don't fail me, Rupert." Thomas warned as the man hesitated, his hand on the doorknob. "I don't want a repeat of what happened with

Sebastian. If you mess up the Museum wards as you did with the ones around this house, I won't be quite so forgiving."

Rupert shivered, as Thomas' idea of being forgiving had involved several hours of being tortured until Rupert had begged for his life. "I won't, Thomas."

"I want those papers about the stone delivered to me today." Thomas ordered. "And I'll see you on 12th March for dinner at 6.30p.m. Bring a partner."

Rupert inclined his head, and then fled.

Two Days Later

Thomas finished scanning the rooms in the cottage that had once belonged to the long-dead archeologist, coming up empty-handed. After releasing and obliterating the occupants, he left.

Mione smiled at Thomas as he walked into her office. "You look tired."

"I've been trying to track something down." Thomas pulled Mione up off her chair and into his arms, relishing the feel of her body against his.

"Can I help?" Mione offered as she wrapped her arms around Thomas' waist.

Thomas thought about it for a few moments. "Do you remember Cammie talking about the Four Pilasters?"

Mione's face dropped slightly at the mention of her deceased niece, and she answered hesitantly. "Yes..."

"I'm looking for the stone that Jackson supposedly found, to add to my collection." Thomas knew that Mione would immediately assume he was talking about the rare antiquities collection which had originally included the Verto Corpus.

“You can’t find it?” Mione shivered as Thomas kissed her neck.

“I’ve come up completely empty.” Thomas pulled Mione’s blouse out from her skirt. “So do you want to help?”

“Of course I do. When do you want me to start looking?” Mione began to unbutton Thomas’ shirt as his hands glided over her bare back.

“I certainly don’t expect you to try and find it right now.” Thomas unclipped Mione’s bra, and transferred one of his hands from her back to fondle her left breast.

“Good.” Mione closed her eyes as Thomas started to kiss her.

All conversation about the stone then ended, as Thomas pulled Mione onto the floor and began to make love to her.

24th February 2005

St Mungo’s – 5.52 p.m.

Cassandra gripped the arms of the chair that she was sitting in, as she watched through the toughened observation window as Harry began his transformation. “Uncle Craig, do you think it’s as painful as it looks?”

Craig nodded. “Yes, I’m afraid that it is.”

“But it’s not the same for an Animagus, is it?” Cassandra asked.

Craig shook his head. “It’s a totally different thing altogether. When an Animagus changes, magic makes the transition easy; it’s a little like water flowing over a waterfall. At the top it forms a pool, it changes to droplets as it falls, and then it reforms a new pool at the bottom; there’s no violence or pain involved. However, the werewolf transformation literally rips the body apart before reassembling it.”

As the transformation came to an end, Cassandra could see the werewolf lying panting on the bed. "Is it in a coma as well?"

Again Craig nodded. "Yes, while Harry remains in a coma, so will the..." His words were cut short as the werewolf climbed to its feet and howled. "I stand corrected."

"Does this mean that Harry will wake up tomorrow morning?" Cassandra couldn't tear her eyes away from the werewolf as it padded up and down the room.

"I don't know." Craig admitted. "This is the first time I've had a case where someone who is a werewolf has been in coma. During the last two changes, the werewolf remained unconscious, and didn't move."

"Oh Merlin." Cassandra winced as the werewolf began to hurl itself at the window separating them. "I thought he couldn't see us."

"He can obviously sense us." Craig was puzzled. "We've never had a werewolf act like this after a transformation before. They might pace around the room, tear up bedding, or howl but no-one's tried to break out."

Cassandra couldn't stop the tears that filled her eyes, as Harry bloodied himself up as he continued to hurl himself against the window. "I can't watch this."

"Go get yourself a cup of tea." Craig instructed, as he intended to continue observing.

Cassandra left the room, only to return just over an hour later to find that Harry was lying on the floor at the foot of the window. "He seems quieter now."

"He settled down not long after you left the room." Craig could see that the bloodstains on the window were bothering Cassandra, but with the room under lockdown there was little he could do to remove them. "I don't know what to make of his behavior."

Moments later, Harry got up and started hurling himself at the window again. Craig turned to Cassandra. "I don't know how or why but I think it's you he's trying to get to."

As much as Cassandra didn't want to go, she couldn't bear to see Harry hurting himself like that. "I can't go home with him like this. I'll go sleep in Harry's hospital room, and see him when you bring him back in the morning."

Craig kissed his niece on the cheek. "Go ahead then. I'm going to observe for another hour or so, and then I'll head off myself, but I'll be back before the moon sets."

"Goodnight." Cassandra headed out of the room, to find H.J. walking towards her. "Hi, H.J. Come to check on Harry?"

"Is everything alright?" H.J. could see that Cassandra was looking upset.

"I'll tell you as we walk." The two of them set off towards Harry's usual room.

Albany, New York – 5.15p.m. (U.K. – 10.15 p.m.)

H.J. apparated into the house Remus had rented, and headed into the dining room. "Good afternoon, Remus."

"Good afternoon, H.J." Remus was sitting drinking a cup of tea. "As you're alone, I presume you haven't told Hermione about tonight. So where did you tell her you were going?"

"I didn't. I dosed up her afternoon tea as I don't want her linked to this in any way." H.J. admitted. "She'll sleep until lunchtime tomorrow, which will give me enough time to get back. I'll tell her about it then. Thankfully she doesn't work on a Friday."

Remus checked the time. "It feels strange to know that if I was back home, I'd have already changed. I wonder how Harry is doing."

H.J. told him. "I dropped by St. Mungo's on my way here, and ran into Cassandra. She said that the werewolf woke up, so Cassandra's hopeful that Harry will wake up tomorrow when the transformation is over."

"I hope so too." Remus knew from Craig and Sirius that Harry was slowly starting to emerge from his coma, and Remus wondered if this latest transformation had speeded things up.

H.J. poured himself a cup of tea. "So are you ready for this?"

"I have to admit to being a little nervous." Remus owned. "But that's more for your sake than for his."

"Buffy will take care of me." H.J. smiled at the tiny blonde girl, who had just come into the room and placed a rifle onto the floor.

"As long as you keep out of the way if I have to shoot Remus, I will." Buffy picked up her own cup of rapidly cooling tea, and sat down. "I've just checked on Starr, and he's still whining."

"I can't say I'd be too happy if I'd been locked up down there for a fortnight." Remus remarked. "I almost feel guilty about it, but he hasn't been mistreated..." Here Remus hesitated, before adding one final word. "...yet."

"I'm going to talk to him." H.J. put down his tea, drew up his hood, before heading down to the basement, and up the corridor which led to the barred cell. "Hello, Starr."

"Just who the fuck do you think you are keeping me here?" Duncan snarled at H.J.

"I'm the man who wants a confession from you." H.J. leant casually against the wall. "Now if you're prepared to confess to Miss Black's attempted murder and..."

Duncan interrupted H.J. "This is about Cassandra Black?"

“Not unless you know any other Miss Black’s who you tried to kill, and threatened to rape just before Christmas, then yes, it is.” H.J. again didn’t get a chance to finish what he intended to say, as Duncan began to protest.

“I didn’t touch the stupid bitch after that night at the bar.” Duncan denied what H.J. claiming. “And besides, I’ve already paid for what I did to her that night.”

“But not for what you did to her later.” H.J. reminded him.

Duncan shook his head. “I didn’t touch her after that. That prick Sebastian dragged her out of the bar, and I didn’t see her again.”

“Unfortunately for you, I don’t believe you.” H.J. pulled out his wand. “Now, I have to admit that I’m tempted to just to force the truth out of you right now, but I know someone would be really pissed at me if I did. So I’ll see you later, Starr.” With that H.J. walked off.

As he turned the corner, he found Remus waiting for him. “So what do you think?”

“He’s guilty.” Remus fell into step with H.J. as they walked up the corridor towards the stairs. “When you first started talking to him, he was angry, but he wasn’t nervous. That changed when you mentioned Cassandra’s name; his adrenalin spiked, and he became terribly nervous, and strangely enough, scared. And I could definitely sense a lot of hatred when he mentioned Harry.”

“I was hard pushed not to try and force a confession out of him right then and there.” H.J. admitted.

“I know.” Remus sighed. “I wanted to do the same when I arrived yesterday, but I’m going to get a lot more satisfaction from our original plan. I want that little bastard begging by the time we’ve finished with him.”

“Do you think you’ll be able to control the wolf?” H.J. opened the door at the top of the stairs.

“I don’t know.” Remus wasn’t sure. “So if I make any aggressive moves towards you, then get out.”

“Don’t worry; I won’t hesitate to get out of the way.” H.J. shivered. “Going through the transformation for Harry that first time was horrendous, and not something I’m in a hurry to experience ever again.”

“The two potions are a huge help.” Remus liked that he could still think somewhat clearly once transformed. “The painkilling potion has made a difference to Harry’s life, and the Wolfsbane has done the same for mine.”

“Despite that, I still think I’d prefer to pass on the whole werewolf thing.” H.J. sat down.

“Being a werewolf has its advantages but I don’t blame you for not wanting to find out about them.” Remus then brought up something he’d spotted on his trip down to the basement the previous day. “Did you notice the scar on Starr’s face?”

H.J. nodded. “Yes, why?”

Remus explained why it had caught his attention. “Because he didn’t have it in Cassandra’s memory.”

H.J. wondered if one of the Slayers had done it. “So you don’t know where he got it from?”

Remus’ comment answered H.J.’s unasked question. “None of my girls did it. Trudi, one of the Slayers, said that he’s got scars all over his back and chest as well.”

“So do you think someone tortured him recently?” H.J. asked.

Remus did. “I’d suspect Dominus, even though in Cassandra’s memory he only used the Cruciatus on Cassandra’s attacker. If he was pissed off that Harry got away, perhaps he took it out on Starr.

Whoever did this didn't rush to heal him otherwise his scars would have vanished."

"This might work in our favor." H.J. decided. "If he's already been tortured recently, then he might be more likely to break down quickly. But if he doesn't, I'm sure I'll be able to persuade him to talk eventually."

H.J. gave Remus a somewhat malicious smile just as Buffy walked back into room carrying two flagons of potion. "You'd better take these, Remus, as you've got less an hour until the moon rises."

Remus got up and stared down at his tiny girlfriend. "Are you sure you want to be a part of this, Buffy? H.J. isn't dragging Hermione into it, and I feel guilty doing this to you."

"Don't feel guilty, Remus. I want to do this, and you need someone to watch your back." Buffy smiled as Remus lifted her up off her feet, and slowly and thoroughly kissed her. "And for some strange reason, I think I might miss that if you ended up in Claustrum or Azkaban."

Remus lowered her back down to the ground. "As would I."

H.J. couldn't help but be amused at the sight of the much shorter Buffy standing next to Remus, but his amusement was short-lived as he noticed the time. "Remus, you'd better take those potions, as we need to finalize what we're going to do."

The trio then spent the thirty minutes discussing things through, before Remus stood up. "It's time to go."

Buffy picked up the rifle she'd brought in earlier. "I'm ready."

"Let's go then." H.J. put up his hood, and spelled it, and Buffy's into place, effectively holding them there so that they masked their faces. He then picked up the tray he'd unshrunk earlier. "Buffy, I'm going to call you Olive throughout this. I'm not going to take the chance you'll be identified, and none of the other Slayers have that name."

“Okay Popeye.” Buffy retorted. “But we could have gone with a different name; I’m not exactly fond of Olive.”

“It doesn’t matter what name I call you, as long as Starr has no idea of who you are.” H.J. knew that when the Slayers had taken Starr down, they too had had their faces hidden; all of them taking care not to reveal who they were.

“Call me Joan then.” Buffy chose the name she’d once used when she’d lost her memory.

“Joan it is then.” H.J. shook his head in amusement as he headed for the basement. Once he reached the cell, H.J. took out his wand. “Back away from the door.”

Duncan backed up as H.J. unlocked the door, and stepped inside. “What do you want?”

H.J. ignored Duncan, as he carefully placed the tray he was carrying on a table far out of Duncan’s reach. “Good evening.”

Duncan glanced nervously at the tray, and lashed out with the only weapon he had, words. “Fuck off.”

H.J. pulled out his wand, and spelled chains from the ceiling and floor which shot out to secure Duncan, mimicking the conditions that Cassandra had been held in. “As I was polite to you, I expect the same in return. Swearing at me isn’t very polite.”

“Fuck you.” Duncan resorted to the same retaliatory gesture of his previous comment.

H.J. backhanded Duncan in the same way that Cassandra’s attacker had done constantly to her when she’d sworn at him. “Every time you swear, I’ll be repeating my actions.”

“What do you want?” Duncan could feel blood trickling from a small cut on his cheek.

“First of all, we’re going to have some fun.” H.J. raised his wand. “Exuo Induviae Primoris.”

Duncan found himself bare to the waist, revealing the numerous scars that criss-crossed his body. “Why are you doing this?”

“Because I don’t think Dominus punished you enough the first time for disobeying his orders, and hurting Cassandra Black. So are you ready to confess?” As much as H.J. simply wanted to hurt Duncan for what he’d done to Cassandra, he still had to give him the opportunity to confess first.

Duncan paled as H.J. mentioned Dominus, but denied what H.J. was saying. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“If you’re not willing to talk, then I think fifteen lashes will do for starters.” H.J. aimed his wand at Duncan. “Verbero Pectus Quindecimens.” H.J. then walked over to the table, picked up the sandwich he’d made himself earlier, and calmly watched as lash marks appeared on Duncan’s chest, making the man scream out. “Silencio. I’d like to eat my sandwich in peace and quiet.”

When the punishment was over, H.J. dropped the silencing spell and put down his half-eaten sandwich. “Are you ready to talk yet?”

Duncan spat at H.J. “You can go fuck yourself.”

“I think it’s time I introduced you to my pet.” H.J. then backhanded Duncan again for swearing, before turning to Buffy, who was standing outside of the cell. “Joan, please release Wolfie.”

Duncan’s complexion became slightly green as a door slid back, and a fully grown and growling werewolf entered the room. “You can’t be serious.”

H.J. stepped over to where Remus was standing; the werewolf sniffing the air and picking up the smell of the blood that the beating had caused. H.J. scratched him behind his ears, showing Remus that he wasn’t afraid of him. Even though Remus had taken Wolfsbane,

what H.J. was doing was still risky, but the lupine half of Remus noted that H.J. didn't seem afraid of him and didn't intend him any harm, so he allowed the petting to continue. He did, however, recognize that Duncan was very afraid of him, and Remus growled lightly in his throat.

H.J. grinned inside his hood as he finished petting the werewolf, before walking back over to where Starr was chained up. "Now, Starr, as you can see I am serious. So I want you to tell me what were you doing on the night of 23rd December 2004."

"It's none of your fucking business." Duncan snapped out.

H.J. backhanded him yet again, causing Remus to growl. "Remember what I said about the language. You're not only upsetting me, but my pet as well."

"As I said, it's none of your business." This time Duncan refrained from swearing at H.J., as he glanced nervously at the werewolf whose amber eyes were locked on him.

"Ten galleons that Wolfie here thinks it is." When Remus growled once more, H.J. called out. "Joan, let out ten feet of chain."

Remus surged forward as the chain was loosened, growling and yipping as he got within a few feet of Duncan. Duncan pulled back as far as the chains holding him would allow. "You'll end up in Claustum if you let him touch me."

"Who's going to find out, Starr?" H.J. threatened. "You'll be dead."

Duncan tugged futilely at his chains, and asked the same question he'd asked earlier. "Why are you doing this?"

"Because I want a confession from you about what you did to Cassandra Black." H.J. repeated what he'd asked for earlier before the punishment had begun. "If you want me stop, then confess, and afterwards I'll hand you over to Commander Black to deal with."

As soon as H.J. said 'Commander Black', Duncan presumed that H.J. was from British Auror Division. "Even if I did do something to her, and I didn't, a confession gained under torture won't stand up in court. As an Auror you should know that."

H.J. laughed. "You think I'm an Auror?"

"I know it's you, Sebastian." Duncan said confidently.

"Harry Sebastian is in a coma in the hospital thanks to your boss and his bitch." H.J. knew from Cassandra's memory that it was a woman who'd been ordered to teach Harry a lesson. "And I have no affiliation whatsoever to BritAD."

"I don't believe you, and this won't stand up in court." Duncan countered.

H.J. pulled out his wand. "I swear on my life and my magic that I am not Auror Harry Sebastian, and that I have no authority whatsoever from BritAD to carry out what I'm doing."

Duncan watched white light cover H.J. before the man collapsed to his knees. "Hurts doesn't it?"

"Not as much as I'm going to hurt you if you don't give me what I want." On that parting remark, H.J. walked out of the cell; only to return a few minutes later after taking a painkilling potion. "If you're not going to confess, then I think it's time to get down to some serious business. You like to hear people beg, don't you, Starr?"

"I don't know what you mean." Even though H.J. was talking to him, Duncan didn't look at him as he couldn't take his eyes off Remus. When H.J. had left the cell, the werewolf had settled down onto the floor, and was now watching the proceedings through half-opened eyes.

"I think you do." H.J. walked over to the table and picked up a knife. "So if you don't want to confess straight away, I'm happy to continue to amuse myself for a while until you do. I'm bored with the whip, so I

think this will offer more entertainment.”

Duncan screamed as H.J. brought the knife down across the back of Duncan’s shoulder, not deeply enough to do major damage, but enough to hurt. “As you can see, Dominus’ bitch isn’t the only one who likes to play with knives.”

“I didn’t touch Black.” Duncan screamed again as the knife came down once more.

“I don’t believe you.” H.J. glanced over to where Remus was now sitting up. “Wolfie?”

Remus growled deeply. H.J. sighed as he brought the knife down across Duncan’s back yet again. “Sorry Starr; neither does Wolfie.”

“I never touched her.” Duncan ground out. “So I’m not confessing to something I didn’t do.”

“And as I don’t believe you, I’m not going to stop until you do confess.” H.J. laid the knife back down on the table. “I still might want that later. I think a short spell under the Cruciatus should be next.”

Duncan’s eyes went wide. “That’s illegal.”

“Ask me if I give a flying fuck.” H.J. turned his wand on Duncan. “Crucio.”

Duncan screamed as H.J. didn’t hold back in the slightest, pushing all the power he could through his wand.

After almost a minute, H.J. dropped the curse. “Now would you like to confess?”

Covered in snot, blood and vomit, Duncan still refused. “Go to hell.”

“Let’s try a different approach then.” H.J. reholstered his wand, and returned once more to the table. Once there, instead of picking up the

knife, he slipped on a pair of rubber gloves, and selected a small bottle. "This is sulfuric acid. Now unless you start talking, I'm going to start dropping it onto your skin."

Duncan, while mostly able to use his abilities through his touch, was to a certain extent able to read human emotions, and even though he wasn't able to determine them nowhere near as accurately as Harry or Remus could, he could sense that H.J. wasn't joking. "What do you want from me? I've already admitted that I used my abilities on Black that night at the bar. I wanted to sleep with her, and I knew she wouldn't say yes otherwise."

"I already know that." H.J. undid the bottle. "Now I want to know about what you did to Cassandra Black on the night of the twenty-third."

Duncan was transfixed by the bottle in H.J.'s hand, but he still wasn't going to own up. "I didn't touch her."

"Wrong answer, Starr." As Duncan pulled as far back as he could from H.J., H.J. dropped some of the acid onto Duncan's stomach.

Duncan began screaming as the acid immediately began to burn into his skin. "Please, I swear I didn't touch her. I didn't touch her."

H.J. turned to Remus. "Wolfie?"

Remus growled loudly, signifying that despite the torture the young man was enduring, he was still lying.

H.J. dropped more acid onto Duncan's chest prompting more screams. "Now I can get very creative with where I put this. So are you going to confess or not?"

"No." Duncan cried out, tears falling down his cheeks.

H.J. returned to the table, and replaced the bottle. "The acid will continue to eat away at your body until I neutralize it. Confess, and I'll make the pain stop."

Duncan gritted his teeth, and shook his head. H.J. sighed, and aimed his wand at Duncan. "Excorio Distraho Pectus Quinque."

Duncan's screams were even worse than those the acid had drawn from him, as five strips of skin began to peel away from his chest. After a few seconds, H.J. ended the spell before it got very far; his own stomach beginning to revolt at the sight of the peeling flesh. "Ready to talk yet?"

Duncan surprised H.J. when he still refused. "No."

"Then it's back to getting creative." H.J. summoned the bottle of acid, and used his next spell to completely divest Duncan of his clothes.

Buffy blushed behind her hood but didn't look away.

"Now Starr." H.J. held the dropper just a few inches away from his intended target. "Guess which part of your body I'm going to get creative with if you don't tell me the truth." H.J. then asked for a confession one final time before he carried out his threat. "Did you torture Cassandra Black on the night of 23rd December 2004?"

Duncan's eyes were wide as he shook his head from side to side. "I DIDN'T FUCKING TOUCH HER."

"I suggest you take a very deep breath then." H.J. let one single drop fall just below Starr's belly button. "No guesses as to where the next drop is going."

Duncan was finding the pain from the burns that H.J. had already inflicted almost unbearable, and he wasn't willing to take the risk that H.J. would follow through with his threat. Tears falling down his cheeks, he finally gave in. "For fuck's sake, please stop it. I'll tell you whatever you want to know."

Having gotten what he wanted, H.J. flicked his wand and spelled Duncan's trousers back onto him, intending to fetch the neutralizer for the burns on his stomach and chest. He didn't get far, however, as upon hearing Duncan's implied confession, Remus' anger

overwhelmed him, and the werewolf hurled himself forwards, his paws scrabbling for purchase on the stone floor, as Remus strained angrily at the chains trying to reach Duncan.

Duncan screamed with fear. "Get it away from me."

Making sure that he'd moved to somewhere Remus couldn't reach him, H.J. called out to Buffy. "Joan, reel him in."

Buffy tried to do as H.J. asked, struggling as Remus pulled just as hard to stay where he was. "I can't. He's tugging too hard."

"Shoot him then." H.J. couldn't take the chance that Remus would break free. He had a feeling that the lupine half of Remus was now in control, and he had no wish to see his friend punished by death, or a spell in Azkaban, if he got free and got hold of Duncan.

Locking the chain in place, Buffy hurriedly picked up the gun and shot Remus; the werewolf giving a yelp before collapsing into a heap.

H.J. move to face Starr, who in addition to tears streaming down his face, also had a very telling damp patch which was spreading across the front of his trousers. "You should know that we've only tranquilized him, and he can easily be administered an antidote. And if you refuse to co-operate in any way from now on, I promise I'll walk out of here, and let him have you."

"Just don't let him near me." Duncan had lost all control of his bladder as Remus had turned on him; the snapping jaws mere inches from his legs. "I'll talk. Just give me the antidote to the acid."

H.J. applied the neutralizer before returning to sit on the table; his own legs feeling a little shaky at the angry display that Remus had just given. "Now it's time for some questions. How did you come to join Dominus, and why don't you have a Dark Mark?"

"I can't tell you." Duncan had sworn an oath not to reveal anything about Dominus.

H.J. guessed at the reason why. "Did you swear an oath?"

Duncan nodded. "Yes."

H.J. wanted to ensure that what little information he could find out was actually the truth. "As I have no idea whether you're being honest or not, you're going to be swearing another oath that whatever you can tell me will be the truth. I've already listed your crimes down on that parchment, and after I've finished questioning you, you're going to sign it. If you don't swear the oath and sign the parchment, then I'll walk out of here, and leave you with him."

"Give me a wand." Duncan held out a hand.

H.J. neutralized the magical spells on the chains, petrified Duncan from the neck down, and shoved his spare wand into his hand. "Now swear the oath."

Having little choice, Duncan did as H.J. asked, sagging in his chains as H.J. took back the wand and released the Petrificus spell. "Don't I get something for the pain?"

"Dream on." H.J. didn't give a damn how much pain Duncan was in. "Now let's start again. Why don't you have a Dark Mark?"

"I can't tell you." Duncan repeated what he'd said earlier.

H.J. knew that Dominus had to have some way to get in touch with Duncan. "Does Dominus have another way of contacting you instead?"

"I can't tell you." Duncan knew that he'd die if he revealed the ring he wore.

"Are you a Death Eater?" H.J. asked the most obvious question.

"Yes." Duncan admitted.

"Are there other Death Eaters at USAD?" H.J. needed to find out if there was anyone else in the organization loyal to Dominus.

Duncan had been approached by one of the Death Eaters in USAD to join Dominus, and therefore answered in the positive. "Yes, but I can't tell you who."

"Do they have a Dark Mark?" H.J. knew that Sirius would have to be told.

"I don't know." Duncan had no idea if they had a Dark Mark, or wore a ring, as he did.

H.J. knew that it was unlikely that Duncan could tell him anything else of import relating to USAD, so he changed the subject. "Who did that to you?" H.J. nodded towards Duncan's chest. "And I'm not talking about what I did."

"Another Death Eater." Duncan spat out the sentence; his hatred for the Death Eater clearly written over his face. "Like you, he said I hadn't been punished enough for disobeying orders about Black, and he then spent almost an hour making up for it."

"Do you know his name?" H.J. realized that while Duncan couldn't tell him anything specific, he could discuss generalities.

Duncan shook his head, and gave H.J. more information than he'd asked for. "No but he's one of the Death Eaters who wears a different mask from everyone else."

H.J. filed the information away. "So was anyone else punished for what happened to Cassandra Black?"

"I don't know." Duncan had been taken from his home, and removed to Castrum Home for his punishment. "But I do know that some of the Death Eaters who let Sebastian and the young girl escape were punished."

"Was one of them a woman?" H.J. guessed, aware from Cassandra's memory that a woman had been sent to punish Harry.

"Yes." Duncan confirmed H.J.'s assumption. "And there was also another man who was punished but I don't know why."

"Do they have different masks?" H.J. tried to work out how close to Dominus the two others were.

"The woman's mask is different but it's not the same as the Death Eater who did this to me. Both of them have silver embossed snakes on their white masks, but his has a skull on it as well." Duncan continued to spill his guts to H.J. "But I don't know about the other man who was being punished as I didn't see him; I could just hear his screams."

"Do any of the Death Eaters have a silver mask?" H.J. recalled that Voldemort's closest advisers wore only silver masks.

"Yes, just one person." Duncan responded. "His mask has a red embossed snake and skull on it."

"Whose apprentice is this person?" H.J. snapped out, aware that if Dominus had followed his previous practice, then the red symbols signified a trainee.

Duncan didn't know what H.J. was talking about. "I don't know anything about an apprentice."

"Was this person punished as well?" H.J. wondered if it was Dominus' apprentice, or whether the apprentice belonged to one of his sidekick's as Harry had to Amicus.

"No. I only saw him for the first time at a meeting just before I was captured and brought here." Duncan had been called to a meeting several nights prior to his capture. "He was standing on a dais with four other Death Eaters."

"And Dominus no doubt." H.J. deduced, not really expecting Duncan to be able to answer the question. "I take it that the man and woman you've mentioned were two of the four up there?"

Duncan nodded. "And two other men who had identical masks to the woman. Only the man who tortured me, and the one you said is an apprentice had different masks."

Deciding that he'd exhausted the subject of masks, H.J. tried to ascertain Dominus' location. "Do you know where the meeting took place?"

Duncan had no idea as he'd used his ring to apparate. "I don't. Just that it's somewhere in England."

Knowing that it would be futile to continue questioning Duncan about the location, H.J. once again changed the subject. "The young girl who escaped. She was recaptured wasn't she?"

"Yes." Duncan responded. "The last time I saw her was on the night after Christmas."

H.J.'s heart missed a beat, as he'd received Dominus' note on Christmas Eve, and he'd therefore believed that Cammie was already dead by then. "Where did you see her?"

"We were both taken to the cell where Sebastian had been kept. It originally had a sealed door but by then it had been changed to open bars." Duncan shivered at the memory. "There was a werewolf in there."

"What happened?" H.J. could feel his stomach churning.

"We were made to watch while the guards, who'd been standing outside of Sebastian's cell, were brought out. The girl was told that she was about to be shown what happens when you fail." Duncan could still picture the young girl's face. "She was absolutely terrified."

H.J. closed his eyes for a moment, before opening them again, and continuing to question Duncan. "What happened?"

Duncan continued. "Even though she was frightened, the girl was still the only person there brave enough to stand up for the two guards, and she begged for them."

H.J. felt pride ripple through him at Cammie's bravery, and he wished more than ever that he could have told his daughter how he felt about her. "Go on."

Duncan did as H.J. asked. "When the girl protested, she was given the opportunity to take the two men's places but not surprisingly she refused. After that, the two men were then portkeyed into the cage, and we were both forced to watch as the werewolf attacked them."

H.J. realized now why Duncan had been so terrified of Remus, having seen exactly what a werewolf was capable of. "And what happened to the girl after that?"

Duncan didn't know. "She was taken away. I didn't see her again."

H.J. wondered how badly Cammie had been tortured, given the state of both Harry and Cassandra. "What kind of condition was she in?"

"She had a large bruise on her face, but I couldn't see any other damage to her. At the time I could barely see myself." Duncan had had to be supported into the corridor to watch the executions.

H.J. swallowed hard at the thought of anyone hurting Cammie. "Why were you there?"

"Because the man who did this to me wanted to show me what would happen to me if I went anywhere near Black again." After what Regulus had done to him, Duncan had absolutely no intention of going anywhere near Cassandra again for as long as he lived.

"Would you have raped her?" H.J. asked quietly.

Duncan had little choice except to answer truthfully. "I... yes."

H.J. turned his wand on Duncan. "You bastard."

"I'm co-operating." Duncan broke out into a sweat at the menace in H.J.'s voice. "You said you wouldn't hurt me if I did."

"That was before I found out that you would have raped Cassandra Black. I knew you'd threatened her but I didn't know that you would have truly done it." H.J. snarled at him. "Now I do know, I should take a knife and make sure you can't ever hurt any woman in the way you were going to hurt that young woman."

Duncan's heart felt as if it was going to leap out of his chest. "Please no."

"Strange how the tables have turned, isn't it, Starr?" H.J. walked back to the table and picked up the knife. "You seem to think that I'll go easy on you if you beg. But you weren't going to show Cassandra Black any mercy when she begged, were you?"

"Please don't." Duncan started to cry as the lamplight caught the blade of the knife.

H.J. held the knife up in front of Duncan, and in a quiet but menacing voice, he demanded a response. "Answer the question, Starr. You weren't going to show Cassandra Black any mercy just because she begged, were you?"

"Please don't do this." Duncan screamed out the words.

"Answer the fucking question." H.J. drew the knife down Duncan's already bloody chest, hesitating when he reached the waistband of Duncan's trousers. "Yes or no?"

"No." Duncan was sobbing heavily now. "Please, for the love of Merlin, don't do this to me. Please, please, don't do this."

“Cassandra Black has more balls than you ever will.” H.J. was disgusted. “So why did you do it?”

“To get back at Sebastian.” Duncan sobbed out the words. “He ruined my life.”

“You are a cowardly piece of shit, and I don’t want to look at you anymore.” H.J. withdrew his wand.

Thinking H.J. intended to kill him, Duncan began pleading again. “Please. I’ll do anything. Just don’t kill me.”

H.J. sneered inside his hood. “You’re not worth going to Azkaban for. Intemporaliter Pubertas.”

Duncan just kept on crying.

“I really wanted to castrate you, Starr. But that will have to do.” H.J. pointed to the table. “Now, I’m going to release you, and you’re going to sign your name to that confession.”

Duncan’s knees gave way as the chains vanished, but he picked himself slowly up, and shuffled over to the table. Then, still sobbing, he read through the paper, before signing his name to it.

H.J. picked up the parchment. “It’s time to send Commander Black a gift. But what kind of a gift remains to be seen. I’ve decided that as I’ve got your confession, I’m going to leave you in here for the rest of the night.”

“You can’t leave me with him.” Duncan protested, fear written all over his. “I did as you asked.”

“You almost killed a girl. And all because you held a grudge against Sebastian for punishing you for something you were guilty of.” H.J. snapped. “So I really don’t care that you eventually did as I asked. I’m going now. I suggest you try and get some sleep before he wakes up. It’s going to be a long night otherwise.”

H.J. vanished everything in the room except for the chains which he reattached to Duncan. "I'll see you in the morning if you survive. Goodnight."

Duncan dropped his head, and continued to weep and beg hysterically. H.J. took the opportunity to quietly cast a spell, which put up a barrier between Remus and the crying prisoner, ensuring Duncan's safety by stopping Remus from reaching him.

H.J. then unlocked the cell and left, making certain that the door was securely spelled closed behind him. Buffy followed him out of the basement and upstairs. "Remus will go to Azkaban if he gets loose when he wakes up, H.J."

"The chains won't let him get close enough, and I've put up a barrier to stop Remus reaching Starr. He'll be able to get within a foot or so of him; close enough to frighten Starr but not close enough to do any damage." H.J. removed his hood, and poured out a glass of red wine. "I really hated doing that."

"You sounded as if you were enjoying it." Buffy pulled off her own hood.

"Not in the slightest but I did what had to be done." H.J. handed over the glass of wine to Buffy. "I need something stronger."

Buffy gratefully took the glass and took a large mouthful of wine, before asking a question. "Would you really have castrated him?"

"Yes." H.J. shuddered as the firewhiskey blazed a trail down his throat. "I've done it to men before, so it wouldn't be the first time but I wanted him in one piece. I don't think Sirius would be very forgiving if I sent Starr to him bleeding from his crotch."

Buffy gave a tight smile. "I think you might be right. So what exactly did that spell do him?"

H.J. phrased his answer as tactfully as he could. "He's never going to enjoy the pleasures of a woman with a certain part of his anatomy ever again."

Buffy was a lot blunter. "You mean he can't get it up?"

"Exactly." H.J. took another large mouthful of the firewhiskey. "I know it's doubtful that once he reaches Azkaban that there'd be any opportunity, but I wanted to deny him the pleasure anyway."

"I think he deserved it." Buffy thought the punishment fitted the crime. "And if he's been using his abilities to sleep with women, then in my book that's tantamount to rape anyway. Can it be undone?"

"Yes." H.J. smiled spitefully. "But only by the caster, and hell will freeze over before I remove it."

Buffy wouldn't have done so either. "So what do we do now?"

"Wait for morning." H.J. refilled his glass. "You can go to bed if you want to, but I know I'm not going to be able to sleep. I still don't know what happened to Cammie, and what Starr told me has made things even harder for me. I know Dominus must have tortured her if she was sporting a bruise. I was hoping he'd killed her quickly but now I'm not so sure. And that disturbs me more than anything."

"Why did Dominus tell you he'd killed her on Christmas Eve when he hadn't?" Buffy had noticed the time discrepancy between H.J. receiving the letter, and Cammie being forced to watch two men die.

"Revenge I suppose..." H.J. truly didn't know. "...for sending him here."

With H.J.'s permission, Buffy had been brought into the fold over the Christmas period, and told about Harry, H.J. and Mione by Remus. "But wouldn't it have made more sense for Dominus to let you think Cammie had survived, and then told you he'd killed her? It's what I'd have done. Lulled you into a false sense of security thinking that

there was an outside chance she might still make it back, and then dropped the truth on you like a large rock.”

“Remus warned me that you suffer from the handicap of sharing your internal monologue sometimes.” H.J. observed in a bemused voice.

“Hey, I just say what I think.” Buffy protested. “But you’ve got to admit that I’m right.”

“I don’t know, Buffy.” H.J. refilled his glass yet again. “You don’t have the mind of a psychopath so you can’t really say what he’d do.” H.J. didn’t say that he himself would have done exactly what Buffy suggested.

“Something I suppose I should be grateful for.” Buffy sighed. “Do you want to talk about it?”

H.J. shook his head. “Not really.”

“Let’s go watch some TV then.” Buffy got up. “Come on. It’s still early, and as you said, it’s going to be a long night.”

St Mungo’s – 7.28 a.m. (New York – 2.28 a.m.)

Cassandra had joined Craig only seconds before the moon set, and Harry began his transformation back to himself. “Can I go in now?”

“The room will come out of lockdown at 7.30a.m.” Craig wanted to get in to see how exactly much damage Harry had inflicted on himself. “So we’ll have to wait.”

To Cassandra, the two minutes she had to wait seemed to drag on for an eternity. As soon as the door unlocked, she pushed in front of Craig, and knelt down by Harry, stroking his face. “Harry?”

Harry moaned lightly but didn’t wake up, and Cassandra looked askance at the white-coated healer standing over them. “Uncle Craig?”

Craig had by now draped a blanket over Harry, and was checking his vitals. "Dammit. He's still in a coma. I don't know why the werewolf was able to overcome it, and Harry can't."

Craig apparated Harry onto the bed, and began to heal his injuries. "He made quite a mess of himself."

Cassandra picked up Harry's hand. "I wish I didn't have to go to work today."

"Harry will be fine." Craig reassured Cassandra. "You'll be late if you don't get going."

Cassandra bent over and kissed Harry lightly on the lips, whispering quietly to him. "I love you."

Then she hugged Craig, and set off for the apparition point.

Albany

Down in the basement, Duncan was unable to sleep, and spent the rest of the night huddled as far away from Remus as he could get. Unfortunately at four a.m. the tranquilizer dissipated, and Remus slowly woke up.

Duncan swallowed hard as he heard a noise. Looking up, he found himself face to face with a very wide awake werewolf. Remus had by now calmed down and was in control again, but he spent the rest of his transformation growling and snapping at Duncan, taking pleasure when a still sobbing Duncan tugged hard against his chains trying to get as far away from Remus as he could.

When H.J. went down into the basement just before the moon was due to set at 7.30a.m., he found Duncan curled up in a ball, sobbing quietly, while Remus stood guard over him. "Wolfie, you can back off now."

Remus gave one final growl and headed for the doorway, his chain trailing behind him. Buffy closed it, and then went to collect a blanket and a painkilling potion.

Inside the cell, H.J. dropped the barrier, and released Duncan from the chains. "I know that the confession you've made won't stand up in court. But I'm warning you now; if you go back on what you've signed your name to, I'll hunt you down, and I'll make what you did to Cassandra Black look like a picnic. And before you die, I'll carry out the castration I should have done to you last night. Do you understand?"

Terrified, Duncan nodded. H.J. then petrified him, and affixed an envelope to his chest. "Give Commander Black my regards."

With that final parting rejoinder, H.J. threw a portkey onto Duncan, and he vanished.

Ministry of Magic - 12.30p.m.

Thankful that she hadn't had to teach a class that morning, Cassandra yawned as she returned from lunch with Lucy Viking. She stopped walking as she realized a crowd had gathered up ahead. "What's going on?"

Lucy shrugged. "I've got no idea."

Cassandra pulled out her wand and I.D. "Step aside please." She recognized Fred Weasley standing in front of her. "What's going on, Fred?"

"This man just appeared." Fred stepped aside to reveal a very bloody and smelly Duncan Starr.

Cassandra paled and stepped backwards. "Thank you. I'll take it from here." When no-one moved, Cassandra snapped out an order. "This is BritAD business, so I want everyone out of here." She looked down at Starr. "Obviously except for you."

Lucy went white as she met her brother's eyes. "Oh Merlin."

Cassandra turned to Fred. "Would you please let my father know that I need him down here?"

"That won't be necessary." Sirius had already been alerted to a problem. "What do we have here?" Sirius spotted the envelope with his name on it, and cast several spells over it, before picking it up, opening it, and scanning the contents. "Auror Black, please escort Trainee Viking to my office."

"Yes, Sir." Shaking, Cassandra led an equally upset Lucy away. "Come on."

Once inside Sirius' office, Lucy burst into tears. "Who could do that to someone?"

"I don't know." Even though she knew that it was likely that Duncan had been the one to torture her, Cassandra was struggling to hold back her own tears.

Sirius appeared a few moments later. "I've taken Starr into custody. You might want to see this."

Cassandra took the parchment from Sirius, before turning white and dropping it to the ground. "It was him. He did it."

"So it would seem." Sirius pulled Cassandra into his arms where she gave in to the tears she'd been holding back, and started to cry. Sirius rubbed her back. "Lucy, I'm taking Cassandra home. I'd like for you to come with us, as I don't want either of you being alone."

Cassandra had returned back to her apartment a few weeks previously. "I should stay here."

"Not this time." Sirius kissed Cassandra on the forehead, not caring about protocol. He held out his hand. "Lucy, come here."

Lucy took Sirius' hand, and he apparated the three of them to Cassandra's apartment. "I need to get back and interview Starr, but

I'll come straight back afterwards, and tell you both what's happening."

Cassandra wrapped her arms tightly around Sirius' waist. "I wish you didn't have to go, Dad."

"Just sit tight, Cassie, and the worst will soon be over." Sirius rubbed his daughter's back before releasing her, and turning to Lucy. "Lucy, I'm very sorry you had to see that."

Lucy was surprised to find herself being pulled into a hug by her commanding officer, and the tears she'd managed to stem, started afresh. "Thank you, Sir."

Sirius kissed the top of Lucy's head as well. "Please stay with Cassie. I don't want you going home in this condition."

A somewhat bemused Lucy stepped away from Sirius as he released her. "I won't, Sir."

Sirius then vanished, leaving the two girls alone.

Sirius apparated back into his office, and took a calming potion. He then picked up the parchment that Cassandra had dropped, before apparating directly into Duncan's cell. Once there, he sat down, and got straight down to business. "For the purposes of this interview, I should tell you that anything you say can be used in evidence against you. My name is Commander Sirius Black. Please state your own name for the records."

Still in pain, tired and miserable, Duncan did as Sirius asked. "Duncan Richard Neil Starr."

"Thank you." Sirius placed the parchment on the table. "You are being interviewed in connection with the attempted murder and assault of Auror Cassandra Black." Sirius slid the parchment across to Duncan. "Is this your signature?"

Duncan nodded. "Yes."

Sirius knew that he wasn't going to like the answer to his next question but he still had to ask it. "Were you in anyway coerced when making this statement?"

Duncan nodded again. "Yes, I was tortured by a man whose face I couldn't see, and his pet werewolf."

Sirius knew then the identity of one of the individuals who'd extracted the truth from Starr. "His pet werewolf?"

Duncan knew how stupid he sounded. "Yes, his pet werewolf."

Sirius was furious with Remus, even though he wasn't showing it. "In that case, I have to inform you that this statement cannot be admitted as evidence as things currently stand."

"Does that mean I'm free to leave?" Duncan asked quietly.

Sirius nodded. "Unless you wish to freely admit that you executed the deeds listed in this statement. Do you wish to do so?"

Duncan thought about fleeing but then he remembered what H.J. had said to him, and fear overwhelmed him at what H.J. had threatened to do. "I do."

Sirius wondered what Remus had done to Starr to frighten him enough to stand by a confession he didn't have to. "In that case, Duncan Starr, I'm arresting you for the attempted murder and assault of Auror Cassandra Black. You'll be treated for your injuries before being removed to Azkaban, where you'll be judged and sentenced for your crimes."

Shakily getting to his feet, Sirius then stood up and left the room.

The Next Day

Sirius knocked on Remus' apartment door. Remus opened the door. "Sirius, what can I do for you?"

“Don’t fuck with me, Remus.” Sirius marched in. “I know what you did.”

Remus kept a puzzled look on his face. “I have absolutely no idea what you’re talking about.”

“So you’re telling me that you didn’t torture Duncan Starr two nights ago?” Sirius stood with his arms folded across his chest.

“I was a werewolf two nights ago, and completely incapable of torturing anyone.” Remus said calmly.

“Starr claims that a man and his pet werewolf forced a confession from him under torture. A confession that as it stood, I couldn’t use.” Sirius just knew that it had been Remus. “So is there anything you want to tell me?”

“Not really.” Remus wasn’t going to let Sirius know for sure as he didn’t want to make things difficult for his friend. “Did he renounce his confession?”

“Strangely enough, no.” Sirius stared at Remus. “Just what the hell did you do to him, Remus?”

“I didn’t lay a single finger on the man, or say anything to him.” Remus answered truthfully.

“What about your co-conspirator? Who is he?” Sirius pushed.

“Didn’t Starr know?” Remus avoided the questions.

“He didn’t see his face as he was wearing a hood.” Sirius admitted.

“So how do you expect me to know?” Remus asked logically. “Even if I was there, I can’t see through things.”

“Why won’t you just come clean?” Sirius was frustrated by Remus’ refusal to admit to what he’d done.

“If I had done it, it would make things very difficult for you, Sirius.” Remus poured out a cup of tea from the teapot he’d got on his table. “I will say that I spent the night of the full moon locked up, and you know very well that werewolves can’t remember what happened. So if it had been me, I’d never know.”

Sirius knew that this was Remus’ way of telling him he’d done it but that he was never going to admit to it. “When I interviewed Starr at Azkaban, he told me that the man who’d tortured him had used the Intemporaliter Pubertas spell on him.”

Remus hadn’t known, and shrugged. “So?”

“Only the caster can remove it.” Sirius reminded Remus.

“If I did know who it was, I’d never ask him to remove it.” Remus smiled viciously. “And I doubt that you would either.”

“No, I wouldn’t.” Sirius ran a hand over his face. “The person who did this took a hell of a chance, but if you ever find out who it was, tell them thank you.”

“I will.” Remus knew that the subject would now be dropped. “I’m sure that whoever did this had very good reasons for doing what they did. Perhaps someone they once loved went through something like this, and they just wanted to help you out.”

Sirius knew then who the man behind the hood had been. “Perhaps they did. As a father, I can’t ever repay whoever did this for bringing Starr to justice, even if they went about it in completely the wrong way. But as an Auror, I don’t ever want this type of cowboy justice being used again.”

“I’m sure that they know that.” Remus picked up his mug. “So what’s going to happen to Starr?”

“As he’s pleaded guilty already, his sentencing is set for Friday.” Sirius had decided against letting Cassandra witness any of it. “I’ve

spoken to Albus, and he is going to ask for the removal of enough magic to turn the man into a squib, as well as life imprisonment."

"It's people like Starr who make me wish for the death sentence." Remus wasn't a great believer in the harsh punishment, except of in clear cut cases where no ambiguity could be discerned.

"I'd have liked the same but I'll just have to settle for this." Sirius would have used the killing curse himself if he could have.

"I take it you'll be investigating USAD to root anyone else out." Remus met Sirius' gaze.

Sirius had already planned to do so, but he realized that this was Remus' way of telling him that he'd find other recruits within USAD. "Of course." He then yawned. "I really need to get some sleep."

"Is Callista keeping you up?" Remus changed the subject onto something more pleasant.

Sirius smiled as he thought about his three week old daughter. "She's a little madam but we're hoping that her lack of wanting to sleep won't last forever."

"I expect you are." Remus grinned. "So tell me..."

With that, the two men moved on to discuss things of a more pleasant nature.

Next Chapter: Thomas wreaks havoc on the British Museum.

Chapter 44: The Inner Circle

March 12th 2005

Thomas looked over Rupert's notes. "I thought they would have had more security in place."

"They're obviously not expecting anything to happen." Lily observed. "But we still have no idea what kind of security they'll have at night."

"Looking at this, I think a daytime attack will work to our advantage." Thomas decided.

"Don't you think that it's a little risky with the entire Auror Division being on duty then?" Regulus knew that Thomas had probably already made up his mind but he still wanted to make the point.

Thomas had already taken that into account. "Which is why Rupert will be erecting anti-apparition and anti-portkey wards all around the Wizarding Section of the Museum. If you haven't got a Dark Mark, then you're not getting in or out using that method."

"How close is the nearest apparition point?" Lucius knew that the Aurors would come on foot if they had to.

Thomas smirked. "Half a mile. There will be too many Muggles around to risk coming in through the Muggle half of the Museum, which means that by the time the Aurors reach the Museum, I should have what I want."

"What about bystanders?" Lily was aware that there would be visitors as well as guards inside the Museum during the day.

"That's entirely up to you." Thomas watched a satisfied smile cross Lily's face. "I think mid morning will be the optimum time to make the acquisition. I want three teams. Lily, you'll be taking out the first set of guards while Rupert works to erect the wards. Lucius, I want you and your team to deal with any unexpected problems. And Regulus, you and your team will keep guard inside the area the Cartouches are

being kept in. Lily, once you've dispatched the first set of guards, everyone will move in. You and your team will then guard the main entrance and be in charge of dispatching anyone who comes in that way; if they manage to bring the wards down of course."

Lily thought about when the Museum would likely be at its emptiest. "I suppose a week on Sunday will be the best day, won't it? The initial rush to see the exhibits should be over, and it will certainly make our job easier."

Thomas shook his head. "I have a press conference to attend that I can't get out of on that day, so I've decided on the day before."

"Going in at the weekend certainly eliminates some of your Auror problems, as the main staff won't be in then." Regulus observed. "What size teams are we looking at taking?"

Thomas glanced again at Rupert's meticulous notes. "There are ten guards in the main area, not including the possible ten or so in the smaller surrounding areas. Now while I could take out the guards in the main area on my own if necessary, I'd prefer not to get involved unless I have to." Thomas paused for breath before continuing. "And as I don't see the Muggle guards being an issue, I think eight to a team will suffice. Rupert, after you deal with the warding, I'll assist you to bring down the security around the Cartouches."

"Can I take Harry?" Lily had been astounded to discover her son was a Death Eater, as it hadn't been her who'd taken him to the first meeting Thomas had ever held; instead it had been Draco who'd taken Harry along. After her discovery, she'd taken Harry under her wing, and had been training him in the Dark Arts. "I think it would be a good experience for him, as well as providing his first kill."

"Not this time." Thomas wasn't willing to take the chance that the boy would get killed or injured, thereby distracting Lily.

Lily backed down. "I'll wait for another opportunity then."

"I think that's for the best." Thomas hadn't exactly been surprised when, after he'd told her about the apprentices he'd formerly allowed, Lily had approached him to ask if she could officially make Harry her apprentice. After thinking about it, he'd decided to grant her request. However, as he'd already marked Harry, he hadn't been willing to remove the Dark Mark to allow Lily to mark her son in the same way as he'd let Amicus and Remus mark their apprentices.

After thrashing out the finer points of the assault, the group relaxed as Thomas handed out cigars and liqueurs. Over the last year, Thomas had discovered that he quite enjoyed the spirited, and usually barbed, conversations that bounced back and forth among his inner circle when they were together like this. And while he wouldn't hesitate to punish any of them if they overstepped their boundaries, and they knew it, everyone seemed to enjoy the lively discourse.

After sitting back down, Thomas began the discussion. "Lily, I'm surprised that you left Severus back at school."

Lily, who'd declined the cigar, but had accepted a brandy, shrugged. "We both couldn't get the time off, so I told him I'd accompany Harry, especially as Daphne couldn't make it tonight."

"Severus really has no idea of what you're up to, does he?" Regulus leant back into his chair, and drew heavily on his cigar.

"He thinks I'm discussing wards with Rupert, or should I say 'Bill'." Here everyone smirked. "But as I don't dig too deeply into his private affairs, I expect him to show the same respect towards mine." Lily emphasized the word 'affairs' as she spoke, indicating that she was well aware of Severus' extracurricular activities. Lily spared Regulus a glance. "Did you really think I had no idea that he was sleeping with your wife, Regulus?"

"To be honest, yes." Regulus was truly astonished. "I had imagined you'd take it out on Petra if you had known."

“At the moment Severus' absences work to my advantage. If there comes a time when they don't and he's still seeing her, then I may reconsider my stance.” Lily warned.

Lucius wondered if Lily too was seeing someone. “Are you seeing anyone?”

“I've thought about it, but in the end I decided that I prefer to keep my side of the marriage monogamous, even if my husband doesn't.” Lily responded.

Thomas smiled. “It's nice to see someone else believes in the sanctity of marriage.”

“You don't have a mistress?” As this type of discussion had never come up before, Lucius was completely astounded at what Thomas was intimating, as it was the norm for most purebloods to take a mistress outside of marriage.

“I don't.” Thomas could see he'd caught Lucius off guard. “I'm happy with Mione, and have no wish to seek the attention of other women. I married for love, not for money or because my parents chose a bride for me.”

“I agree with Thomas.” Rupert still missed Anna. “I would only ever marry for love.”

“And will you tell her the truth about yourself when you do?” Lucius asked interestedly.

Rupert had no idea. “Until I meet someone I actually want to marry, I believe that it's something of a moot point.”

Thomas decided to stir things up. “While we're on the discussion of marriage, I see that Remus is dating your Slayer, Rupert.”

Rupert's face darkened. “I'm completely confounded as to what she actually sees in him.”

"I'm not." Lily interceded, and knowing that it would annoy Rupert immensely, began to list Remus' finer points. "He's intelligent, good-looking, head of the Council, and his body isn't exactly shabby. And he's also not a vampire or a demon like her former boyfriends." Rupert had complained about Buffy's poor relationship choices in one of the former meetings of the Inner Circle.

Unlike Rupert and Thomas, Lily had no idea that Remus was a werewolf, so Rupert decided to share the information. "Remus may not be a vampire or a demon but he is a werewolf."

Lily was absolutely stunned but quickly rallied. "Obviously your Slayer knows that, and, given that she's been seeing him for a while now, I'd guess that she doesn't mind. And, to be perfectly truthful, I don't think I would either. Therefore the only downside I can see is the fact that Remus is friends with Regulus' brother."

Regulus was aware that Lily hated Sirius but he had no idea why. "Personally, I don't see that as a downside."

"You wouldn't." Lily drawled. "However, if I never saw Sirius again, it wouldn't be too soon."

"But your daughter is married to his son." Thomas pointed out, before Regulus had a chance to ask another question. "Which almost makes you two family."

Lily didn't rise to the bait. "But thankfully not."

Rupert remained on the subject of Sirius. "Speaking of Black, I hear that his daughter has barely left Sebastian's bedside."

Thomas continued with his baiting; this time focusing it on Regulus. "According to Mione, Cassandra has actually been seeing Harry since mid-December. I knew they were friends, but I didn't realize that things had gone as far as they had between them."

Regulus frowned at Thomas' insinuating tone. "What do you mean by that?"

“Cassandra admitted to sleeping with someone when I was threatening her, but she denied it was Harry. Somehow, given her current devotion to him, I think she was lying.” Thomas could see that his words weren’t sitting well with Regulus.

“Just because she’s seeing Sebastian doesn’t mean she’s sleeping with him.” Regulus couldn’t imagine Sirius being happy if she was.

Thomas continued his baiting. “She told me she’d slept with someone in the apartment block where she lives. She sounded quite blasé about it, actually.”

“There’s no way Cassandra would just casually sleep with anyone. She’s not that kind of girl.” Regulus had gotten to know his niece relatively well after he and Sirius reconciled, and he just couldn’t see it.

“Which must mean that she was sleeping with Harry.” Thomas contended. “I have to admit I believed her when she denied it. You should be proud, Regulus; your niece lies well under pressure. Then again, so does Harry.” Thomas smirked. “However, now that I know the truth about their relationship, it gives me something extra to work with in future; just in case I need it the next time I come across Harry.”

Lily scowled. “I thought Sebastian was mine to deal with.”

“He is, if he doesn’t get in my way first. I’m actually a little surprised you haven’t tried to kill him off already.” As he finished speaking, Thomas got up and began to refill everyone’s glasses; something he’d never have done as Voldemort.

“I’d prefer for my revenge to take place somewhere a little more private than St. Mungo’s.” Lily had decided that Harry’s hospital room was out of the question for what she had in mind.

“There are plenty of cells available at Castrum House for your entertainment.” Thomas offered, before barbing his next sentence. “If you can catch him and keep him, of course.”

“As Sebastian believes I'm just Severus' downtrodden wife, I doubt I'll have little trouble in catching him off guard long enough to capture him.” Lily sounded supremely confident in her abilities. “And when I do, there won't be anyone to step in and save him. I'll make sure of that.”

“You'd better hope that Cammie doesn't get out again then.” Lucius joined in with the baiting, as he asked after the person who'd thwarted Lily. “So how is your niece, Thomas? Have you decided what to do with her yet?”

Thomas hadn't. “Well, I'm obviously not going to kill her now. But I know that I can't keep her as houseguest indefinitely. She's already tried to escape twice.”

Feeling that he'd made his point, Lucius grinned at Lily before turning his attention back to Thomas. “She's quite fearless, isn't she?” Lucius had met the girl who'd dared to defy Thomas, and after speaking with her, he'd wished that Draco had displayed half of the courage Cammie had. Not wanting to dwell on the embarrassment he considered his deceased son to be, Lucius dismissed Draco from his mind as he listened to Thomas.

“To stand up to me, she is.” Thomas smiled as he thought about Cammie. “However, I'm afraid that Cammie has created a bit of a problem for me.”

“So why are you keeping her?” Lucius enquired.

“Because I know how upsetting it is for H.J.” Thomas didn't bother to hide his hatred for his former nemesis; his voice reflecting his pleasure at knowing what he was putting H.J. through. “He has no idea of what happened to Cammie. He believes she's dead, of course, and I'm well aware that it haunts him, not knowing what I might have done to her first.”

“So what are you going to do with her?” Regulus knew Cammie quite well now, as Thomas had roped him in to teach the girl, amongst other things, advanced transfiguration and the Dark Arts. “I admit she’s an apt pupil, but we both know that she’ll never join you of her own free will.”

“I did think about forcing her to join me, but I don’t want to do that to her.” Thomas didn’t care about bullying anyone else, but there were a few individuals he’d never do that to; Cammie being one of them.

“Why don’t you just obliviate her, and release her?” Regulus suggested.

“While she is a problem, I do like spending time with her, and it would be a shame to let all of her lessons go to waste by obviating her.” Thomas was torn. “Not only that, she’s also becoming quite a good chess player, and her dueling is improving by leaps and bounds. As much as I know you’re right about her not joining me, I’d like to think that one day I could persuade her to change her mind.”

“I’d be careful.” Rupert warned. “If you continue to imprison her, there might come a day when she turns on you.”

Thomas laughed. “While she might have tried to escape, Cammie doesn’t have it in her to attack me.”

“You did try and kill Sebastian in front of her.” Lily pointed out. “How can you be certain that she won’t one day take revenge for that? Perhaps Regulus is right, and you should let her go if you aren’t going to kill her.”

“Just because I’m a killer, it doesn’t make Cammie one.” Thomas stretched. “And as I still don’t believe H.J. has suffered enough, I think Cammie will be remaining my houseguest for some time yet.”

The group then moved on to other less personal subjects, before they eventually rejoined everyone else from the dinner party.

At the end of the evening, after everyone had left, Thomas took a walk around the conservatory with Mione. "I was thinking this evening about what you said about Cassandra burning herself out."

"Why?" Mione thought it an odd thing to bring up.

"I'm going to be busy over the Easter weekend with the press conference for the new power plant, so I wondered if you might like to take the jet, and spend the weekend in Los Angeles or New York with Cassandra, and perhaps Katherine and Luna. I was thinking you could go on the Friday and come back on Monday morning." Thomas suggested. "I'm sure it would do you and Cassandra good."

Mione's face lit up at Thomas' thoughtfulness. "Would you mind horribly if I asked Tonks and Hermione Sebastian as well? Hermione needs cheering up, and Tonks is pretty much her best friend. To say nothing of the fact that we've all grown quite close after what happened with Cammie."

"I don't see why not." The money was obviously no object to Thomas. "Just let me know who's going, and I'll arrange for an account to be set up at the store or stores of your choice. And if there's something on at the theater on the Saturday night, let me know that as well, and I'll arrange for tickets for all of you."

Mione stopped walking and looked at him suspiciously. "If I didn't know you better, I'd say you were trying to get rid of me."

"Perhaps I am." Thomas countered.

Mione laughed. "As I said, if I didn't know you better, I might be worried." She then frowned. "What about the twins?"

"Mum and Dad want them for a few weeks." Thomas hadn't gotten around to telling Mione about his parents' request that he'd received earlier that day. "They're having some friends to stay who are unexpectedly going to be in the area. Their friends' children and grandchildren are accompanying them, and so my parents want to show their own grandchildren off."

Mione guessed that Thomas had already said yes; something she herself would have done. "When are they going?"

"I'll fly out with them a week on Monday, stay with them for a day or so to settle them in, and then return early on Thursday morning." Thomas could have portkeyed but, as he hated portkeying and preferred for the children to fly, he had decided to take the jet. "The jet will be yours by the Friday lunchtime."

"As I've got less than a fortnight to get things sorted, I'd better get on and send some invitations out." Mione went to turn around, only for Thomas to catch her wrist.

Thomas pulled her to him. "You do know that I love you, don't you?"

In answer, Mione reached up and tugged Thomas' head down to kiss him, before letting him go. "And you do know that you taste of cigars, and there won't be any more kissing until you've brushed your teeth, don't you?"

Thomas laughed. "Sorry, I forgot you hate the taste of cigars."

"As you're paying for my weekend away, I'll forgive you." With that Mione headed off for her office, excited at the prospect of a weekend in New York with her friends.

25th March 2005

A very worried Cassandra stood in Harry's hospital room. "Perhaps I shouldn't go, Dad."

"Craig has already said that it's unlikely Harry will wake up just yet, even if the werewolf does again." Sirius put his arm around Cassandra's shoulders. "You need a break, Cassie. You look awful, and I don't think Harry is going to be very impressed when he does come to, and he sees how run down you've let yourself get."

Cassandra leant into Sirius' side. "I don't know, Dad. I'm worried that Harry will hurt himself again tonight."

"Craig said that Harry only behaved like that when you were in the room." Sirius reminded her. "Now unless you want me to place you on sick leave, I suggest that you kiss Harry, hug me, make your way down to the apparition point, and then operate that portkey."

Aware that Sirius would carry out his threat if she didn't go, Cassandra bent over Harry's bed where, in order to avoid bedsores, he was hovering just slightly above the mattress. Pushing back his much longer hair, she gently kissed him. "I'll be back before you know it. I love you."

She then straightened up and hugged Sirius. "I'll see you on Tuesday then."

"Have a good Easter." Sirius hugged Cassandra, before picking up her bag and passing it to her. "Try and have a good time."

"I will." After giving Harry one last glance, Cassandra left the hospital room.

By the time she finally made it to the aircraft, which had begun taxiing towards the runway, Cassandra found that she was the last to arrive. "Sorry I'm late. I didn't want to leave Harry. Dad had to practically shove me out of the hospital."

"H.J. did the same with me." Hermione admitted. "I only arrived two minutes ago myself."

Mione wasn't entirely surprised at the two girls' reluctance. "I'm glad they did it. You both need a change of scenery."

Katherine took a sip of the champagne that Geraldine had just served her. "I didn't need kicking out, but I don't think Orion was too pleased I was going."

“He sees you every day.” Mione pointed out. “He’ll just have to live with it.”

“James didn’t mind. He’s got several books he said he wants to read in peace and quiet.” Tonks finished off her glass of champagne. “How about Xander?”

“Xander went out and bought me a book on the magical beings that live beneath the sewers in New York.” Luna beamed as she held up the extremely large book. “So I’m guessing he just wants me to have a good time.”

Mione stared in amazement at the tome. “Luna, we won’t be doing much exploring in the sewers.”

“I still wanted to bring it along; just in case.” Luna smiled sweetly at Geraldine, who was waiting to see who else needed anything before take-off. “Can I have some more of this pina colada stuff, and I’d like lots of cherries, please.”

Cassandra nervously looked out of the window as the plane began to pick up speed. “I’m a little worried about this flight, even though I’ve taken the stronger potion you sent over.”

Mione tried to reassure Cassandra. “It’s exactly the same potion you took when you flew back from Varsity, so you should be alright.”

“I was drugged up to the eyeballs then, Mione.” Cassandra took a bottle of water from Geraldine who, after passing Luna her drink, then hurried back to her seat. After glancing out of the window once more, Cassandra nervously turned her attention back to her host. “Mione, would you mind if I portkeyed after all?”

“Wait and see how you get on.” Mione grabbed Cassandra’s hand, and held it tightly as the plane lifted off. “We’ll have to talk about something interesting to take your mind off the flight.”

"I can think of something." Tonks grinned. "We all know now that you're dating Harry, but what we don't know is if you've slept with him yet."

Katherine nudged Tonks. "You can't ask her that."

Luna disagreed. "Why not? You asked Tonks what it was like to sleep with him the evening before your wedding to Orion."

Katherine looked embarrassed. "I didn't ask about Harry per se; just about what sleeping with a man was like. It's not my fault that Tonks chose Harry as an example."

"That's because I couldn't think of a better one." Tonks answered Katherine, before grinning at Cassandra. "So have you slept with Harry, and if so, how was it?"

As all five women turned their attention on her, Cassandra fingered the portkey she'd got in her pocket, wishing she'd used it instead of flying. "You don't honestly expect me to tell you, do you?"

"I told you about Xander." Luna protested.

"Luna, we couldn't stop you." Katherine remarked tartly.

"Well, Xander was so good at..." Luna's words were cut off as a hand was clamped across her mouth by Katherine.

"Luna, we know exactly what Xander was good at." Katherine removed her hand, and smiled kindly at Cassandra. "I expect that like me, you're waiting for marriage before you sleep with Harry or anyone else, aren't you?"

Not giving Cassandra a chance to answer the question, Tonks disabused Katherine of any ideas she might have had about Harry and marriage. "Harry's not the marrying, happily ever after, fall in love kind of man, Katherine. So if Cassandra's hoping for that with him, she's going to have a long wait."

Luna had noticed Cassandra's face when she'd mentioned not wanting to leave Harry. "He might not be in love with you, but you're in love with him, aren't you?"

Cassandra reluctantly nodded. "I'm certifiably head over heels for him."

"But you haven't slept with him, have you?" Having known her all of her life, Katherine couldn't believe that Cassandra would have slept with someone who didn't love or want to marry her.

Cassandra's face burned as she answered the question honestly. "Actually I have, and before you ask, no I don't regret it."

Tonks persisted with her questioning. "So, what did you think?"

Cassandra was aware of everyone's eyes upon her yet again. "I'm not telling you that."

"We'll share, if you do." Luna spared Katherine a glance, as she was aware that her friend was glaring at her. "Or don't you want to tell us because it was as awful as Katherine's first time?"

Katherine exclaimed loudly. "It wasn't awful, Luna! It was just awkward, as it wasn't only my first time, it was Orion's too." Katherine scowled at Luna. "I really wish I hadn't told you."

"And I really don't need to hear this about my brother." Cassandra felt like putting her fingers in her ears, and going 'la, la, la'.

"Get used to it." Tonks warned her. "We've still got six and a half hours until we land, and we all know what women talk about when they get together."

Cassandra groaned in dismay, and glanced at Hermione. "You haven't said much, Hermione."

“I’m not quite sure what I should be saying.” Hermione looked uncomfortable. “But I do know that I won’t be discussing my first or any other time with H.J.”

“Spoilsport.” Luna opened her book. “I’ll just read then.”

As the plane hit an air pocket, Cassandra's stomach went over, and she immediately unbuckled her seatbelt, and stood up. “I think I'm going to portkey after all, Mione.”

Hermione, who still had no love of flying, quickly offered to accompany Cassandra. “I’ll go with you; make sure you're alright.”

Mione could see that the conversation, as well as the flight, was making Cassandra uncomfortable. “We’ll see you both at the hotel then. Cassandra, you’re sharing a suite with me and Luna. Hermione, you, Tonks and Katherine have the other one.”

Tonks immediately apologized, as she too perceived what had upset Cassandra. “Sorry, Cassandra. I didn’t mean to chase you away. We'll talk about something other than Harry. Please stay.”

“You didn't chase me away, Tonks.” Cassandra could feel sweat breaking out on her forehead. “I just think that flying isn't for me.”

Hermione spotted how pale Cassandra had gone. “I think it's time we left.” Hermione put her arm around Cassandra, and operated her own portkey. “Girls' Weekend Out.” The two girls vanished, only to reappear in one of the suites that Thomas had reserved from the previous night, allowing the girls to arrive earlier if they so wished. Having stayed in the suites before, Thomas had also arranged for the portkeys to take the girls directly there should they need to portkey, as Mione had anticipated that Cassandra might be unwell.

Cassandra quickly hunted down the closest bathroom, and promptly threw up almost as soon as she reached the toilet. “I really, really hate transatlantic travel.”

“Do you want some more potion?” Hermione had extra on her.

“ Please.” Cassandra took some more, feeling better almost immediately. “Thanks for coming with me. It was...” Cassandra jumped as music began drifting out of her pocket. “I loathe this thing.”

“You’d better answer it.” Hermione suggested.

Cassandra pressed the correct button. “Black.”

“It’s me, Cassandra.” Tonks’ voice came through loud and clear. “We were just checking that you’re alright.”

“I’m fine now.” Cassandra reassured her cousin. “So we’ll see you when you arrive.”

“We’ll be there shortly.” Tonks informed her. “We’ve decided that it’s silly to fly if you’re already there, so we’re all going to portkey over in a little while.”

Cassandra realized that the group was obviously trying to give her a little time to collect herself before they turned up. “I’ll see you later then.” She then rang off. “I forgot to switch the phone off on the plane.”

“One of the reasons I prefer to portkey. I don’t have to think about things like that.” Hermione headed over to the wet bar, where she poured out two glasses of cold water.

Cassandra slid her phone back into her pocket. “I’ve got Harry to thank for having that dratted thing.” After what had happened at USAD, Harry had recommended that all Aurors and trainees carry a cell phone, and Sirius had agreed with his recommendation, hence the new addition to Cassandra’s person.

“They can be useful, particularly if you want to contact someone in a hurry.” Hermione handed over one of the glasses, and decided to talk to Cassandra about Harry. “Cassandra, I know this is none of my business, but I think Tonks is wrong about Harry.”

Cassandra sat down next to the young woman. "Wrong about Harry how?"

"About Harry not being the marrying kind." Since discovering the two had been dating, Hermione had discussed Harry and Cassandra in depth with H.J. "H.J. thinks Harry's scared of getting hurt again, and that's why he shies away from getting too involved in a relationship."

"That's pretty much what Uncle Remus told Dad." Cassandra took a mouthful of the cleansing water, and decided to open up to the friendly young woman. "Hermione, I've already discussed this with Harry. He knows I love him and, as long as I can be with him, I don't care about marriage. All I want is for us to be together." Cassandra got up, and started pacing. "And right now with Harry is exactly where I want to be."

Hermione also got up, and placed a hand on Cassandra's arm to stop her from walking back and forth. "You're worried about Harry's transformation tonight, aren't you?"

"I only came this weekend because Dad threatened to stick me on sick leave if I didn't take a break." Cassandra revealed.

"H.J. will be there with him." Hermione reminded Cassandra. "So stop worrying. Nothing's going to happen."

St Mungo's – The Next Morning

Craig finished checking Harry over. "How do you feel?"

His eyes still closed, Harry groaned. "Everything hurts."

H.J. smiled. "Harry, you've got no idea how good it is to hear your voice."

"Shh." Harry's head felt as if it was going to explode. "Potion?"

Craig, who had made sure he was there for Harry's transformation, spelled Harry's bed into an upright position, cancelled the flotation spell, and helped Harry drink a painkilling potion. "You're going to feel weak for a while."

As he finally felt able to open his eyes, Harry made his second request. "Water?"

Craig held out the glass of water with a straw in it. "Take it slowly."

Still not quite coherent, Harry took a few sips. "Why am I here?"

"You're in for a bit of a shock, I'm afraid." H.J. sat down on the edge of the bed. "You've been in a coma, Harry."

Harry's head felt as if it was full of cotton wool. "How long?"

"Just over three months." H.J. said softly.

At the shocking news, Harry quickly came to full awareness. "Three months?"

"It's March 26th." Craig informed him. "We actually didn't expect you to wake up yet. Even though you'd been showing signs of coming around; opening your eyes for short periods; spontaneous words; nothing indicated that you were really aware of your surroundings. But I should have known that you wouldn't follow the textbook cases."

Harry was completely blown away, and was about to say something, when his memories flooded back, and he remembered why he'd ended up in a coma. "Cass?"

H.J. immediately reassured Harry. "She's fine now, Harry. Normally she'd be here, but she's actually on a vacation as Sirius felt that she needed a break from acting as his assistant."

Harry was confused. "Assistant?"

“Cassandra not only took over your teaching position to help out Sirius.” H.J. informed Harry. “But she’s also working as his assistant covering the more basic things that go through the office.”

Harry felt a little put out. "Obviously no-one missed me."

H.J. grinned, and teased Harry. "Not particularly. You'll be especially pleased to hear that I'm also helping Sirius out in your stead. Alasdair was supposed to be taking your Friday afternoon classes to teach the more physical side of things, but I offered to do it as I need the practice, and, as Cassandra put it, she needs a guinea pig."

“And Cammie?” Now that he’d ascertained that his girlfriend was safe, Harry moved onto his next topic of concern.

H.J.’s face became grave. “She didn’t make it back, Harry.”

Harry took a few moments to take in what H.J. was saying. “What happened?”

“Cassandra appeared first at Varsity after she activated her medical ring. Then a little while later you appeared at St. Mungo’s, but your medical ring was on your stomach, and not on your finger.” H.J. enlightened Harry as to the order of events. "But Cammie never came back."

“Why wasn’t I wearing my ring?” Harry tried to recall exactly what had happened but he could barely remember anything.

“We don’t know.” H.J. admitted. “We were hoping that you could tell us what happened.”

“I can vaguely recall seeing Cammie, and that she helped me destroy the chains holding me, but to be truthful most of what happened is a blur.” Harry rubbed his head, his arm feeling shaky and weak. “Are you sure that Cammie is...” Harry couldn’t bring himself to say the word ‘dead’.

H.J. took a deep breath as he nodded. "Dominus sent me some mementos and a note reminding me of what happens to people who cross him. Cammie's memorial was held on New Year's Eve."

Harry closed his eyes as they filled with tears. "Fuck. I'm so sorry I failed you and Hermione, H.J."

H.J. found himself being pulled into a very feeble hug, and he had to fight to hold back his own tears. "Don't ever think that, Harry. Even though I don't know what happened, I do know that you'd have done everything you could for Cammie. Hermione wouldn't say any differently if she were here."

Harry opened his eyes again as he reluctantly let go of H.J. "How is Hermione?"

"Not great to be honest." H.J. sighed heavily. "I think I'd better fill you in on everything that's happened."

As Craig left, Harry spent the next few hours listening to H.J. talk. "You tortured Starr?"

H.J. nodded. "I wanted someone to take it out on for what happened to Cammie, and the bastard deserved it anyway for what he did to Cassandra. The upshot of our actions is that Starr's now a squib and has been imprisoned for life in Azkaban. I will you tell that even though he was happy that Starr had confessed and stuck by the confession, Sirius wasn't best pleased about how we obtained it. He first had a go at Remus, and told him to warn me not to do anything like that again. However, he obviously wanted to make sure that his point was driven home, as when I got into work, he told me that he knew I'd done it, so he tore some hefty strips off me as well. But I don't regret doing it, and neither does Remus."

"Neither would I." Harry said vehemently. "I'd have offered to take Remus' place if I'd been able to."

"Harry, there's something else we need to discuss. It's about Cassandra." H.J. could see that Harry was tiring but he wanted to

give Harry a head's up. "When Cassandra arrived at Varsity, the healer who admitted her believed she'd been raped."

Harry paled. "Raped?"

"Don't panic." H.J. could see that he was going about telling Harry in the wrong way. "They only thought that because when Cassandra was first admitted, and the healer checked her over, she discovered that Cassandra had had sex sometime that day. Once she was conscious, Cassandra told Sirius that she had hadn't been raped, and ended up telling him exactly why the healer thought that she had."

Harry didn't have to be a genius to put two and two together. "So Sirius knows I've slept with Cass, doesn't he?"

H.J. nodded. "At the time he was ready to kill you but it's hard to stay angry with someone who's in a coma." H.J. stared at his brother. "I thought you said that the two of you were just going to be friends, Harry."

"It's what I intended." Harry coughed, prompting H.J. to help him drink some more water. "But we both decided that we wanted more than that."

"Are you in love with her?" H.J. asked a little hesitantly.

"I'm not sure how I feel about her, H.J." Harry sighed as he tried to put into words his feelings for his girlfriend. "When Dominus was threatening her, I wanted to rip his throat out for touching her, and when I thought she might die, all I could do was think about how to get her out of there. I don't know if I'm in love with her, but I do know that I'd die for her if I had to."

H.J. couldn't believe that Harry was so obtuse about his own feelings, but he decided that Harry would eventually get a clue, and so he let the subject of Harry's feelings go. "Well, I know how Cassandra feels about you. Sirius hasn't been able to drag her out of this room when she hasn't been in work."

“So she hasn’t moved on?” Despite everything that H.J. had told him so far, Harry was still worried that that Cassandra had decided to end things while he’d been in a coma, and that it was just friendly concern that had prompted Cassandra to spend so much time with him.

“Harry, Cassandra nearly ripped open her wounds to spend a night with you when she was first transferred from Varsity Hospital.” H.J. then explained about what Cassandra had done when they’d been reunited.

“So she really still wants to be with me?” Harry didn’t realize quite how needy and vulnerable he sounded.

“Yes, Harry. She most definitely wants to be with you. It's blindingly obvious to anyone who's seen her in here, that Cassandra's more than a little in love with you.” H.J. couldn’t help but smile as Harry's questions, together with Harry's declaration about how he'd give up his life for Cassandra if he had to, told H.J. everything he needed to know about Harry's feelings for Cassandra. "I don't think she'd have slept with you otherwise."

"So who knows I've slept with Cass, apart from you and Sirius?" Harry couldn't see Sirius broadcasting his daughter's sexual activities far and wide.

H.J. confirmed Harry's thoughts. "Remus and Buffy, and more than likely Faith, but as far as anyone else is concerned, the two of you were just dating."

Relieved that his and Cassandra's private lives were still pretty much that, Harry changed the focus of the conversation to the couple that H.J. had mentioned. "Is Remus still seeing Buffy?"

“He spends practically every weekend with her.” H.J. informed Harry, before realizing something. “How did you know they were seeing each other? I only found out in January.”

“Buffy told me just before the shit the fan.” Harry revealed. “Do you think it’s serious?”

H.J. frowned, as he thought it an odd question. “Why, Harry?”

Harry decided to level with H.J. “Because Buffy told me that Remus was in love with Mione, and that their relationship was basically just for the companionship.”

“I think that’s changed then.” H.J. reassured Harry. “Buffy is going to be transferring to London from New York in a couple of weeks so that she can see more of Remus, and Xander and Luna will be leaving London to move up to Scotland.”

“I really have missed a lot haven’t I?” Harry's head was spinning with all the new information he was having to process.

H.J. didn't get a chance to answer as a knock at the door signaled a new arrival.

After exchanging a few words with the Auror outside of Harry's door, Sirius closed the door behind him, smiling widely as he saw that Harry was awake as Craig had said, and, even better, looking alert. “Harry, it’s good to see you awake at last.”

“Sirius.” Harry wondered if Sirius had come to make good on his threat to kill him now that Harry was conscious. “It's, err, good to see you too.”

Sirius could hear the worry in Harry’s voice, and he guessed that H.J. had already told Harry that he knew about Harry and Cassandra's relationship. “I’m not going to jump down your throat about Cassie. You’ve only just come out of a coma.”

Harry relaxed. “Thank you.”

Having had plenty of time to get used to the idea, Sirius couldn't resist teasing Harry. “I’m going to wait until you’re well enough to do that.”

H.J. couldn't help but burst out laughing. "Sorry, Harry. But your face was a picture."

Harry scowled at his brother. "Where is Cass now? H.J. said she was on vacation."

Sirius confirmed what Harry had been told. "She is. She's in New York with Mione and the girls for a weekend together. I was afraid if she didn't take a break, she'd burn herself out, so even though she didn't want to go, I forced her to."

Harry now became concerned about exactly how much time Cassandra had been spending with him. "She is alright, isn't she? Or hasn't she recovered properly yet?"

"She's just tired, Harry." Sirius reassured Harry. "Craig checked her over a few days ago as I was worried as well, but he said that she's completely healed from her injuries."

"Good. Did Craig say how long it would be before I get out of here?" Harry focused on himself, now that he knew that Cassandra was truly alright.

"About a week or so, depending upon how quickly you get your strength back." Sirius had just finished speaking to the healer about Harry's prognosis. "I'm sure Cassie will be glad to see you up and about."

"I can't wait to see her." Harry admitted. "I know you and H.J. have both said that she's fine, but I'll feel better once I've seen her myself."

Despite his words, Sirius decided to put Harry on the spot. "So given that, exactly how do you feel about my daughter, Harry?"

"I'm going to tell you what Nick Shacklebolt told me when I asked him the same about Kennedy." At the time, Harry had been impressed by Nick's confidence in standing up to someone the young man had known was a werewolf. "Sirius, I care deeply for your

daughter but our feelings are between us. All you need to know is that I'd do anything for her."

Sirius knew that that was the best he was going to get out of Harry. "Thank you for at least telling me that. But as her father, I should warn you that I'll kill you if you hurt my little girl."

"I understand." Harry had pretty much said the same to Nick Shacklebolt, much to his daughter's embarrassment.

"Now we've gotten the big bad dad chat out of the way, we need to talk about..." Sirius' words were cut off as his ring began vibrating. "Dammit."

Harry could feel his own ring vibrating as well. "I thought this would have been deactivated."

Sirius shook his head. "Not if it's a major emergency it wouldn't be, and this must be. Given your condition, I obviously don't expect you to come with me."

Harry didn't feel as if he could turn over, let alone answer an emergency call. "No worries on that score."

H.J. had a feeling that a major emergency meant Dominus. He turned to Sirius. "Do you want me to come with you?"

Sirius knew it had to be big if both his and Harry's rings were vibrating, and he couldn't think of anyone other than Dominus who was likely to be the cause. "Very well. Take my arm."

As it was an emergency, Sirius overrode the hospital wards, and apparated them both to the Ops Room. "Talk to me, people."

"We've got a problem at the British Museum, Sir." One of the Aurors on duty informed Sirius. "We got an initial report by phone from Auror Canton, who was actually there with his family to view the exhibits, telling us that a group of at least fifteen Death Eaters had apparated in. Auror Canton managed to get his family out to the Muggle side

before wards went up, and that's where he's stayed. He's reported several casualties including a minor injury to himself, but none on the Muggle side." The Auror then gave the most important piece of information. "Sir, Auror Canton also reported that one of the Death Eaters was wearing a gold mask."

H.J. sucked in his breath at the mention of the gold mask. "Dominus."

Sirius ignored H.J.'s exclamation. "Have teams been dispatched yet?"

The Auror nodded his head. "Two teams, Sir, but they've had to apparate in almost half a mile away."

"That's not acceptable." Sirius was one of the few people who could make a decision to use non-sanctioned areas for apparition. "I'm going to take two teams in via the Muggle side. Please alert the Muggle obliviation teams we'll need them as well."

Cassandra suddenly appeared next to H.J., wobbling slightly as she landed. "What's going on?"

Sirius scowled at the unexpected appearance by his daughter. "What are you doing here, Auror Black?"

"I was lying in bed when my ring went off." Cassandra had dressed hurriedly, taken several doses of the anti-nausea potion, and portkeyed out. She looked around the busy room. "What can I do to help, Sir?"

"Sit down until you can portkey back to New York." Sirius wasn't about to let Cassandra face Dominus, especially as she didn't have field experience.

Cassandra wanted to protest but a look from Sirius silenced her arguments. "I'll man the desk here, Sir."

"Thank you, Auror Black." Sirius was relieved that Cassandra had realized that he didn't have time for silly arguments with her. Sirius glanced at H.J. He had a feeling that the young man would follow him

if he didn't take him along. "Sebastian, Solace, Moran and Shivers, you're with me. Deluca, Moriarty, Weiser, and Flanagan, you're with Venice. Black, please instruct the Muggle obliviation teams to apparate directly to the Muggle side of the British Museum."

Cassandra didn't get a chance to respond as the two groups vanished.

Next Chapter: We find out exactly what's going on at the Museum.

Chapter 45: The Dark Mark

Cammie picked up the small box that had been sitting on her bedside table for almost a week. When she'd asked Dominus why he'd left it there, he'd told her it was a reward for mastering the Imperius curse. Cammie took the ring out of the box and ran her finger over it, before replacing it back inside. As much as she loved the silver filigree ring, she didn't want to reveal to Dominus that she did.

Bored, Cammie wandered through her suite of rooms, before picking up a book. Five minutes later, after re-reading the first page several times, and still not having taken a word of it in, Cammie threw it across the room. She was fed up with living in the opulent, but restrictive surroundings. And even though she was allowed to roam the house as long as she wore the hated white and silver symbol embossed mask she'd been given by Dominus, Cammie wanted nothing more than to leave.

Cammie turned as the door to the corridor opened. On seeing who'd come in, she immediately stood up and greeted the man who'd entered the room. "Good morning, Dominus." Cammie had quickly learnt that if she wasn't polite, she'd be missing meals.

"Good morning, Cammie." After closing the door behind him, Thomas strode into the room. "I'm here to let you know that you will be restricting your activities to your rooms today."

Cammie had been encouraged to both speak her mind and to ask questions by Dominus, and so did so now. "Why?"

Thomas enlightened her. "Because I don't want you getting in the way of my men."

Cammie realized that something major must be happening. "Are you holding a party?"

Thomas laughed at Cammie's assumption. "No. I'm going to the British Museum to acquire some stone tablets, but I may bring back some 'guests', and if I do, I'm quite sure you don't wish to bear witness as to what could happen to them."

Cammie shivered, as she remembered what she'd been forced to watch the night after she'd first tried to escape, after helping Harry get away. "I'll stay in my rooms."

"Thank you, Cammie. I'll see you on Monday." With that, Thomas left the room.

Thinking about one of her previous abortive attempts to flee, Cammie glanced over at the fireplace that she'd tried to escape up. Having no wand, she hadn't been able to cast a cushioning spell, and halfway up the chimney, she'd slipped back down, bruising her face, and twisting her ankle. To punish her, Dominus had left her injuries unhealed.

Then on the next night, he'd taken her down into the basement where, despite Cammie's pleas not to do it, Dominus had made her watch as he'd portkeyed the guards, who'd been guarding Harry's cell, into the same cell as a werewolf he had locked down there. After escorting Cammie back to her rooms, Dominus had warned her against trying to escape again.

Despite all of that, one month later, a desperate and lonely Cammie had tried again; stealing down the staircase in the middle of the night, wearing the hated mask in the hopes that no-one would recognize her. She hadn't even reached the bottom of the stairs when she'd been apprehended by a Death Eater wearing a similar mask to her own. Lucius Malfoy had simply ushered Cammie back upstairs, locked her in her room, and alerted Thomas.

As a punishment, Cammie had found herself spending the next few days locked in a dark, cold room in the basement with only water for nourishment. She'd also had to listen to, so far as she knew, the same werewolf that had killed the guards the previous month, as it had howled out its anger at being locked up. That night Cammie had gotten little sleep. It had also been the last time she'd attempted to escape.

Walking back into her bedroom, Cammie once again picked up the ring. Now that she knew that Dominus would be gone for a while, and

he wouldn't catch her wearing it, she decided to try it on. Slipping it onto her right index finger, the ring resized itself to fit, and Cammie admired how pretty it looked on her finger. A few moments later, hearing a noise outside of her bedroom door, she jumped, and tried to pull the ring back off, only to find that it was now firmly stuck. "No. No. No."

Thomas, who'd known the instant that Cammie had slid the ring onto her finger, stood in the doorway. "Only I can remove it."

Cammie slowly turned around, a hopeful look on her face. "Please take it off."

"I'm afraid that that won't be happening." Thomas had been waiting for Cammie's natural curiosity to get the better of her. "You see, you had to willingly take the ring and put it on. I couldn't force it on you, as it's a derivative of the Dark Mark I've told you about."

Cammie's horror was reflected in her face. "I'm never going to be a Death Eater, and you said that you wouldn't force me."

"The ring doesn't mean that you are." Thomas set Cammie's fears to rest. "But it will allow you to apparate freely inside this house; something only I and several of my men are able to do. Normally you'd need a Dark Mark, which is why I've given you the ring."

"But I can't apparate." Cammie pointed out, as she stopped her futile attempt to pull off the ring.

"I'll be teaching you next week." Thomas informed Cammie, who was now trying to mask her delight at the thought of being able to apparate. "However, I should warn you that the ring won't allow you to apparate outside of this house. If you try to do so, the wards will rip you apart."

Cammie blanched as she realized that Dominus had discerned her thoughts. "I'd better not try it then." Suddenly something occurred to her. "Why do you want me to learn to apparate if I can't leave the house?"

Thomas knew that Cammie wouldn't like the answer, but he still responded truthfully. "Because even though you're refusing me now, I would like to hope that at some time in the future, you'll change your mind about joining me."

It was at that moment that Cammie realized that all the lessons she'd been taught so far, had been in preparation for becoming a Death Eater. "Why bother with the ring and teaching me to apparate, when I've already said I'll never change my mind?"

Thomas reiterated his previous statement. "Because as I've just said, there might come a time when you think differently, and you will need to be able to apparate."

Cammie refuted Thomas' assertion. "You had Uncle Harry tortured, and then you tried to kill him, and that was horrible what you did to those guards. I don't want to be like you, so I'll never join you."

Thomas released Cammie's hand, and gave her some food for thought. "So you've constantly said, but you might want to consider this. I'm not alone when it comes to torturing people. I have it on very good authority that your sainted father, together with Remus Lupin, tortured Starr to get a confession out of Starr about what he'd done to Cassandra Black."

"I don't believe you." Cammie ignored the tiny voice inside of her that reminded her of what she'd overheard H.J. telling Hermione about Wormtail.

"You've already said that you won't join me no matter what I tell you, so I have nothing to gain by lying to you." Thomas pointed out.

"So how do you know?" Cammie challenged Thomas. "I know Dad or Mr. Lupin wouldn't tell you that."

"You're correct; they didn't." Thomas confirmed, as he checked the time. "Now as much as I'd like to stay and talk about this, I can't, as I

have to go. But while I'm gone, please do consider carefully what I'm offering, Cammie."

As Thomas expected her to, Cammie refused yet again. "It doesn't matter how long or carefully I think about it, I won't change my mind."

"In that case, I'll see you on Monday." Thomas inclined his head, and headed towards the door. Contrary to his words, however, it would be almost a week before Cammie would see Thomas again.

As Thomas left the room, Cammie wondered how Thomas had found out about her Dad and Remus. She had no idea that it had been Cassandra herself who'd told Thomas, when she'd opened up to the man whose fault it had been that Starr had been able to attack her in the first place.

March 2nd 2005

Thomas was just going by the front door, intent on returning to the work he had in his study, when the doorbell rang. Dismissing the house-elf who appeared, Thomas opened it himself. "Cassandra, what brings you here?"

"I didn't realize you were at home, Thomas." A pale and tired looking Cassandra wrung her hands nervously together. "I was actually hoping to speak to Mione."

"She's upstairs with the twins." Thomas put an arm around Cassandra's shoulders, and led her into the sitting room. "I'll fetch her for you."

Cassandra suddenly got cold feet, and decided not to talk to Mione. "Don't disturb her. I'll come back some other time."

"Don't be silly." Thomas didn't have use Legilimency to see that Cassandra was upset about something. "She'll just be a minute."

Thomas apparated upstairs, before returning with Mione a few minutes later. "I'll leave you two alone."

Like Thomas, Mione could also see that Cassandra was visibly agitated. "What's wrong, Cassandra? Thomas said you wanted to see me."

"I'm sorry Thomas dragged you away from the twins; it's nothing that can't wait." Cassandra turned to head out of the sitting room. "You should go back to them."

"Theresa is with the twins, so please stay and talk to me." Mione grabbed Cassandra's arm to prevent her from leaving. "Come on. Let's sit down."

Torn between wanting to go and wanting to stay, the need to talk to someone compelled Cassandra to sit down. "I don't know where to begin."

As Mione had no idea what Cassandra wanted to talk to her about, she made a suggestion. "Perhaps you could tell me first whether it's personal or general."

"It's personal." Cassandra chewed her nail nervously. "It's actually about Duncan Starr."

Now she had something to go on, Mione urged Cassandra to continue. "What about Starr?"

Cassandra took a deep breath. "You know that Starr confessed to torturing me, and to being a Death Eater?"

"Yes." Mione, like the others in the group, had been told what had happened. "Has something happened to him in Azkaban?"

"No, it's just that..." Cassandra hesitated. "I think I'd best go. If Dad knew I was here to talk to you about this he'd go mad, as I'm supposed to keep what he told me in confidence."

"You must need someone to talk to, otherwise you wouldn't be here." Mione tried to reason with Cassandra. "And I promise that I

won't tell Sirius that you told me. So why don't you try telling me what's troubling you?"

Before she could change her mind, Cassandra hurriedly blurted out what was upsetting her. "Starr didn't confess of his own free will. H.J. and Uncle Remus tortured him."

Even though she was shocked by what Cassandra had just told her, Mione still didn't know why Cassandra had come to her. "Why haven't you talked to Sirius or Remus about this? Why come to me?"

"Because I needed to talk to someone who has been in a similar situation." Cassandra got to her feet, too on edge to stay seated. "And after what Thomas did to Draco Malfoy, you're the only person I know that has."

Mione also rose to her feet. "So how can I help you?"

Cassandra began pacing. "Mione, I feel guilty about Starr, even though I know he deserved it. Did you feel the same way about Draco?"

Mione knew how guilt could eat away at a person, and judging from Cassandra's appearance, she knew that this was exactly what it was doing to the young woman in front of her. "I did; really badly at first. But after talking it through with Thomas, I eventually came to realize that it wasn't my fault. I didn't ask Thomas to intervene, just as you didn't ask Remus or H.J. to do so for you. You can't stop people from doing what they want to do, Cassandra, and you therefore can't blame yourself for their actions." Mione sat back down as Cassandra relaxed visibly at her response, before she too also sat back down again. However, Cassandra's face still looked troubled. "But I think there's more than that bothering you, isn't there?"

Cassandra nodded. "How could H.J. and Uncle Remus do it, Mione? I know that Dad said they did it for me, but how can one human being do that to another?"

Mione shook her head. "I can't answer that question, as I really have no idea."

"So you don't know why Thomas hurt Draco?" Cassandra looked expectantly at Mione.

Mione did but she thought that Cassandra would benefit from hearing it directly from her husband. "I do but I think Thomas should be the one to tell you why. Can I tell him what you've just told me?"

Cassandra once again became hesitant. "I don't know."

"Thomas won't tell Sirius, if that's what you're worried about." Mione gently coaxed her friend. "Let me tell him."

Needing answers for her own peace of mind, Cassandra nodded. "Okay."

Mione left the room quickly before Cassandra could change her decision, and headed into Thomas' study. She then explained what Cassandra had just told her; Thomas getting up to follow her back into the sitting room after she'd finished.

By the time Mione and Thomas appeared, Cassandra had gotten to her feet, and was again pacing the floor. "I'm sorry to bother you like this, Thomas."

"It's no bother." Thomas assured Cassandra. "Mione said that you wanted to know what drives one person to hurt another."

"I do." Cassandra confirmed. "After what happened with Draco, I was hoping you might be able to offer some insight into why Uncle Remus and H.J. did what they did."

"There could be a lot of reasons why they did it, and I believe that's it probably different for each individual. For me, it was a matter of honor and love." Thomas took Cassandra's arm, and steered her towards the sofa, sitting down next to her. "But if I had to guess, I'd say that in Remus' case, it was his love for you as his goddaughter that incited him to act as he did. But as for H.J., while I imagine that friendship would likely have been the major reason, I also believe that

revenge may have played a part. Starr was a Death Eater, and H.J. may well have seen torturing him as a way of hitting back."

"I didn't think of it like that." Cassandra then shook her head. "While I think you're right about friendship, I'm not sure that revenge would have influenced H.J., as Dad said that H.J. and Remus had offered Starr the chance to confess freely. It was only when he refused, that they tortured him."

"You know H.J. better than I do, so perhaps you're right." Thomas said soothingly.

Cassandra's thoughts were see-sawing despite what she'd just said in H.J.'s defense, and Thomas' answer. "But then again I don't know. You might be right. I do know they must have done something pretty awful to Starr if he stuck to his confession despite not having to."

Thomas agreed with Cassandra's assessment. "I expect that they did, but you'd have to ask them if you want to know the truth."

Cassandra didn't want to know. "My imagination is bad enough without having images of what they really did to him floating around in my head." After falling silent for a few moments, Cassandra had another question for Thomas. "Did you feel guilty about what you did to Draco? That is, if you don't mind telling me."

"No, I don't." Thomas had no problem in being truthful. "Draco insulted my wife, and tried to force his attentions on a guest. But even so, I still offered him, as H.J. and Remus offered Starr, an easy option, which Draco refused. In both cases, Starr and Draco could have simply admitted what they'd done, taken their punishment, and, in Draco's that would have been the end of things, but they both refused. So in answer to your question, no, I don't feel guilty about what I did, and I doubt that Remus or H.J. do either. Starr should just have come clean when he had the chance to do so."

Cassandra gave thorough consideration to what Thomas was saying before responding. "I suppose Starr should have just owned up. But

by failing to do so, did it still give H.J. and Uncle Remus the right to torture him?"

"They obviously believed that it did, or else they wouldn't have done it." Thomas pointed out, before moving onto the crux of Cassandra's problem. "Mione said that you felt guilty about what they did to Starr, but you really shouldn't. You didn't ask them to do it, just as Mione didn't ask me to do anything to Draco, but like H.J. and Remus, I still did it. And given what Starr did to you, I believe he got everything he deserved."

Cassandra lowered her head, and her voice dropped to almost a whisper as she made a confession. "So do I. And even though I feel terrible about what H.J. and Uncle Remus did to Starr, I'm also pleased that he suffered for what he did to me, and I feel horribly guilty because of that as well."

Thomas lifted Cassandra's head up by gently cupping her chin, to see tears sparkling in her eyes. "Cassandra, you shouldn't feel guilty about that either. It's only normal to want revenge against someone who hurt you. I'd feel exactly the same way. The only difference between us is that I'd take the revenge myself, whereas you're too soft-hearted to hurt anyone in the same way I would."

"But I have hurt someone like that before." Cassandra's voice faltered, as she remembered sending the killing curse at Dominus, only to hit the Death Eater instead. "I..I killed someone because I was angry at what Dominus did to Dad."

"Acting in the heat of the moment isn't quite the same as cold-bloodedly torturing someone." Mione rejoined the conversation. "You thought that Dominus had killed your father, and you reacted in exactly the same way I would imagine most people would, by lashing out."

Following on from the change of subject, Thomas posed a question for Cassandra. "This is easily resolved. Just ask yourself this. If Dominus was sitting here right now, could you kill him in cold-blood?"

Cassandra almost immediately shook her head. "No. But I'd want to for what's he done."

"Wanting and doing are two different things." Thomas knew that only too well. "If I was you, I'd admit to yourself that yes, you wanted revenge against Starr for what he did but that you would never have taken that revenge yourself. And also, despite your abhorrence for violence, admit that you're glad that Remus and H.J. hurt him. But when you do, remember that they did it out of friendship and love for you, and not because it gave them any pleasure." Thomas had a feeling, however, that H.J. might have derived some pleasure, but not knowing him well enough, he couldn't say for certain that that was true.

As Cassandra absorbed what Thomas had said, she realized that everything Thomas was saying was exactly right. Relief flooded through her as her confused feelings finally fell into some sort of order, and she burst into tears. "Sorry."

Sitting next to Cassandra, Thomas beat his wife to comfort the sobbing young woman, pulling her to her feet so that he could hold her. "Let it out."

Cassandra had cried since her ordeal, but nothing like this. Holding onto Thomas' shirt with both of her hands, Cassandra buried her face in his chest, and sobbed for everything she'd gone through.

Once again, just as he had on the aircraft when Cassandra had woken up screaming, Thomas felt a measure of guilt for what he'd put her through. For him, remorse was something of a strange feeling, and one he wasn't used to experiencing, particularly in relation to his victims. Rubbing Cassandra's back as she cried, he met Mione's eyes. His wife was obviously upset that Cassandra was hurting, as she too had tears running down her cheeks. Thomas smiled comfortingly at Mione but didn't release Cassandra.

Mione smiled back to let Thomas know she understood, before slipping out of the room to go and wash her face. By the time she'd returned, Cassandra had managed to gain some control, and was

apologizing to Thomas, who merely shook his head, and brushed off her apologies. "Cassandra, you don't need to apologize."

"But I've ruined your shirt." Cassandra's words came out in a staccato stream, hiccups hyphenating her words as she tried to speak through what was left of her tears.

Thomas glanced down at the mascara stains that were marring his shirt. "It will probably come clean in the wash and, if it doesn't, I think I can afford a new one."

Cassandra took a deep breath and smiled. "That was a stupid comment, wasn't it?"

"Not really." Thomas handed over his handkerchief so that Cassandra could blow her nose. "Just forget about the shirt. All that matters right now is whether talking things through has helped."

Cassandra's legs were shaking, so she sat down. "It has. So thank you for being so honest with me; it's really made a difference."

"I'm just glad that I could help." Thomas smiled widely, as Cassandra offered him his handkerchief back. "You can keep it."

As Thomas stood there, Cassandra suddenly realized that she was probably keeping him from his work. "Again, I really do appreciate you listening to me like this." She gave Thomas a watery smile. "And I'm sorry that I cried all over you, and that I dragged you away from your work."

"And I'm sorry that you had to go through what you did." Thomas responded, realizing that he really was truly sorry. "Besides the work wasn't anything that couldn't wait. However, I'll leave you two alone again now."

Mione sat down next to Cassandra as Thomas left. "It's almost dinner time, so why don't you stay?"

“I think I’ve already been enough trouble, and I really should get back to St. Mungo’s.” Cassandra ran a hand down the front of her crumpled dress. “And besides that, I look a mess.”

“Harry isn’t going to disappear if you don’t sit with him for one night. So you’re going to come with me, and I’m going to alter something of mine so that it will fit you.” Mione got back up, pulling Cassandra up as well. “Then I’m going to draw you a bath so that you can have a nice long soak. And while you do, we’ll both have a glass of wine, and chat about silly things. Dinner can wait; Thomas won’t mind as he can finish the proposal he was working on.”

Cassandra wavered, as the prospect of just relaxing with her friend, instead of sitting all alone by Harry’s bed all night in the hope that he’d wake up, was a pleasurable one. “Are you sure?”

“I am.” Not giving Cassandra time to argue, Mione apparated them both upstairs.

Present Time - The British Museum

Sirius stood watching impatiently as their best wards expert, Venice, tried to dismantle the wards blocking his entrance into the wizarding section of the Museum. “How much longer, Venice?”

“Sorry, Sir, but I’ve never seen anything like these barrier wards before.” Venice admitted. “As fast I unravel one layer, another one slips in to take its place.”

“Dammit.” Sirius turned to H.J. “Do you have experience with these types of wards?”

“I’m no wards expert.” H.J. admitted. “What about Harry?”

“He can barely move, H.J.” Sirius pointed out.

“If anyone has the expertise to deal with wards that Dominus or one of his cronies has erected, then it’s Harry.” H.J. argued. “We really don’t have much choice if you want to get in.”

Sirius turned to Venice. "Keep trying. We'll be back shortly."

Sirius took H.J.'s arm and, after once again overriding the hospital wards, apparated them both directly into Harry's room. "Harry?"

Harry, who'd fallen asleep as soon as the two men had left, groggily opened his eyes. "Sirius, is everything alright?"

"No." Sirius responded shortly. "We need your help at the British Museum. Dominus has erected some wards that keep collapsing every time one is removed. Venice hasn't seen anything like them before, and as much as I hate to land this on you, I'm hoping you have."

"They're probably linked into the Dark Mark." Harry surmised. "If you want me to take a look, then you're going to have to help me up."

Sirius pulled back the bedclothes, and despite the urgency of the situation, he grinned at Harry's pajamas. "Nice outfit."

A few minutes later, Harry found himself being supported on either side by Sirius and H.J., and standing in front of the wall that concealed the entrance to the wizarding side of the Museum. "Venice, step aside."

Venice immediately stepped back. "Yes, Sir."

Harry shakily took H.J.'s wand and cast several spells. "I was right. I'm going to have to dismantle them."

Venice gaped in amazement at Harry. "You can't even stand, Sir. Tell me what to do."

"Trust me when I say that you could work on these for a month, and never get through them; whereas I've dealt with these types of wards before." Harry couldn't tell Venice that because he'd once had a Dark Mark, this allowed Harry to access the wards. "I am still, however,

going to need your help. Just do whatever I tell you do as soon as I tell you.”

Harry then spent the next five minutes talking Venice through what he needed as he worked. Suddenly a small bang rang out. “I’ve punched a hole through but I’m not strong enough to bring down the wards completely. And even though I’m using Venice as an anchor, if you go in, I can’t promise that I’ll be able to keep the hole open for very long.”

“I understand.” Sirius turned to his men, who by now consisted of four teams; the two he’d brought with him, and the two teams who’d gone in by foot, having been alerted by cell phone to apparate directly to the Muggle section of the Museum. “Let’s go.”

Harry leant heavily against H.J. as Sirius released him. “You want to go in as well, don’t you?”

“I have to, Harry.” H.J. hoped that Harry would understand.

Harry did. “Be careful, H.J.”

H.J. lowered Harry to the ground, leaning him up against an exhibit that stood opposite the wall. “See you shortly.” With that, H.J. hurtled through the wall.

Suddenly Venice let out a scream, as a spell cast on the wizarding side of the Museum breached the wall, and hit him. Venice’s concentration immediately failed and, with no anchor to hold the hole in the wards open, it immediately collapsed, sealing Sirius and his teams inside. Venice grimaced as he surveyed the gaping wound in his leg that was bleeding profusely. “I’ll patch it up.”

Harry could see that the wound would require more than a field dressing. “Activate your ring, and get out of here. That’s an order, Venice.”

Fred Weasley, who was part of the Muggle obliviation team, came hurrying over to Harry as Venice disappeared. "Are you alright, Auror Sebastian?"

"I'm fine, Weasley." Harry lied as he felt far from fine; he actually felt as if someone had picked him up, shook him around, and then dropped him on his head. "Has everyone been obliviated?"

Fred shook his head. "Not yet, Sir. But we've cordoned off the Muggle section, and several more teams have been brought in to help deal with obliviating so many people. The Muggles who run the Museum believe that there is problem with a rodent infestation, and they've therefore closed the Museum for the rest of the day."

"Good." Harry groaned as he shifted position, causing Fred to frown.

"Sir, perhaps you should activate your ring, and return to St. Mungo's." Fred suggested on seeing how pale Harry had gone.

"I'm staying here." Harry refused to move. "Please let your team leader know that you're going to be running an errand for me. Once you've done that, I need you to inform whoever is manning the desk at Ops that I want another team of Aurors brought in to supervise the Muggle side."

"Yes, Sir." Fred hurried off to inform his team leader of Harry's request, before apparating out.

Cassandra glanced up as Fred came hurrying towards her. "Mr. Weasley, did everything go as planned with the obliviations?"

"It's still in progress, Ma'am." Fred found it odd addressing Cassandra like that, especially given that she was several years younger than him. "But Auror Sebastian has requested another team of Aurors to monitor the Muggle side of the Museum."

"Did he say how many he required in the team?" Cassandra didn't realize that Fred was talking about Harry, as H.J. had been given the honorary title of 'Auror' while he was helping with Harry's classes.

Fred shook his head. "No, Ma'am." Fred also made a suggestion. "Even though he didn't ask for it, I think that Auror Sebastian probably also needs medical attention."

"Is he badly hurt?" Cassandra wondered why H.J. didn't simply apparate to St. Mungo's, as he'd been issued with a medical ring.

"Not exactly." Fred explained what he'd seen. "I couldn't see any injuries on him. But he's really pale, and obviously in pain. When I suggested returning to the hospital, he refused, and so I thought..."

Cassandra's heart almost missed a beat as she realized that Fred must be talking about Harry. Thinking quickly, she dismissed Fred. "Thank you, Mr. Weasley. I'll take it from here." Cassandra then turned to the Auror next to her. "Auror Wilson, please take over for me."

"Belay that order, Wilson. Instead I want you to organize a team of eight for the Museum, and send a healer out to deal with Auror Sebastian." Alasdair Moody barked out instructions, before beckoning to Cassandra. "Can I have a word, Auror Black?"

Cassandra followed Alasdair out of the room. "Yes, Sir?"

Alasdair dropped the formality. "Cassandra, Sirius gave you an order to stay here, and that's exactly what you're going to do."

"But Harry..." Cassandra's protestations were cut off as Alasdair held up a hand.

"It wouldn't matter if Harry was dying, Cassandra. You're an Auror in a chain of a command, and to avoid that chain collapsing, you know very well that you should be doing what you've been told to do." Alasdair placed his hand on Cassandra's arm. "Is that clear, Auror Black?"

Cassandra recognized that Alasdair too was now giving her an order, and as he outranked her, she had little choice but to do as he said. "Yes, Sir. I'll return to the desk."

"Thank you." Alasdair let go of Cassandra so that she could return.

A miserable, and extremely anxious, Cassandra sat at the Ops desk and waited for updates from both St. Mungo's and the Museum. Hearing a pop she looked up, and asked for an update in a nervous voice. "Report, Auror Blenkinsopp."

"Auror Sebastian has requested your presence at the Museum, Auror Black." Came the reply.

Cassandra glanced at Alasdair, who nodded. "Auror Wilson, take over for Auror Black."

Cassandra then apparated out to the designated co-ordinates, before rushing over to where Harry was propped up against an artifact. "You asked to see me, Sir."

Harry's face didn't reflect his worry as he saw how tired and thin Cassandra looked. "I did, Auror Black." Harry dismissed the man who was kneeling down next to him. "Thanks, Bart. That will be all for the moment."

The healer walked off, leaving Harry alone with Cassandra. As much as he wanted to pull Cassandra to him and kiss her, Harry focused on what needed to be done. "Cass, I have a massive favor to ask of you."

"Anything, Harry." Cassandra knelt down in front of Harry, but didn't dare hug him in case anyone was watching.

"I need to give you a Dark Mark." Harry's request shocked Cassandra.

"Are you mad?" The words flew out of Cassandra's mouth before she could check herself.

Harry wasn't surprised by the outburst, and began to explain. "I opened a hole in the wards using the remnants of my Dark Mark. To keep it open, I was using Venice to anchor it, but he was injured and it collapsed. Now even though I've taken pepper-up and a painkilling potion, and despite the fact that I'm physically stronger than most people, Bart has said that I'm almost magically exhausted." Bartholomew Montague was one of the few people at BritAD who knew exactly what Harry was; Harry had had to tell him in case of a medical emergency. Harry continued. "And he's said that as much as I want to, in my condition, I can't try and open a hole again."

Cassandra knew then why Harry had requested her. "So you need someone with a Dark Mark to reopen the wards, don't you?"

"Yes." Harry informed her. "I wouldn't ask but a lot of our people are trapped inside, and we have no idea what's going on."

Cassandra immediately pulled out her cell phone, and dialed Sirius' number. "I'm getting voicemail, so obviously magic must be blocking the signal. So what do I need to do?"

Despite her determined voice, Harry could sense how frightened Cassandra was by what he'd ask her to let him do. "Before I do it, you'll need to find someone you trust to anchor the wards as you can't do it alone."

Cassandra knew exactly who she was going to ask. "I'll be back in a minute."

Only clad in a towel that was wrapped around his waist, a tired Remus jumped as Cassandra appeared in his hallway. "Err, good morning."

"I'm sorry to barge in like this, but I need your help, Uncle Remus. It's an emergency." Her face burning, Cassandra tried to look anywhere but at her Uncle's bare chest, as she explained to Remus what had happened.

“I’ll be two minutes.” Remus vanished, only to reappear a short time later, fully dressed and bearing his wand.

Cassandra grabbed his arm and apparated them both out.

Remus hurried over to Harry. “You look awful.”

“Feel it.” Harry kept his answer brief. “Cass, I want you to sit down, give me your wand, and hold out your arm.”

“I’ll do it.” Remus offered, as like Harry, when Cassandra had been telling him what Harry needed her to do, he’d sensed how scared Cassandra was at the idea of it. “I’m more able to withstand pain than Cassandra is, and I’m also reasonably proficient with warding. Cassandra can anchor me.”

“But...” Cassandra wasn’t in a hurry to take the Dark Mark, and even though she was terrified by the idea, she felt that it was her duty.

“Just do it, Harry.” Remus ordered as he unrolled his sleeve, and then passed his wand to Harry.

“Grit your teeth.” Harry warned, as he placed the wand against Remus’ arm. “Morsmordre.”

Even during his transformations, Remus had never felt pain quite like taking the Dark Mark before, and he was unable to stop himself from screaming out loud. However, his screams went unheard by the rest of the Aurors in the building, as Cassandra had had the foresight to cast a silencing spell just as Harry had begun the curse. As Harry lifted the wand away, Remus panted heavily as he tried to steady himself. “Wow. That really hurt.”

Having used the last of his reserves in marking Remus, Harry dropped Remus’ wand to the floor, and almost imperceptibly nodded to where a pain potion sat. “Drink that. I tried to push as little power into the curse as I could but I’m afraid that being unwell meant that my accuracy wasn’t what it should be. The potion should take away the worst of the pain but not all.”

Remus drank the potion, picked up his wand, and climbed to his feet. Used to pain, he was able to ignore the quite considerable residual discomfort. "What do I need to do?"

In a tired voice, Harry talked both Remus and Cassandra through what he needed. He was very relieved when, just over ten minutes later, the wards silently collapsed. He was also glad that he'd decided to take a chance with the longer route of collapsing them quietly, rather than alerting those inside to the demise of their wards.

Cassandra glanced at Remus. "I'm going in. Stay with Harry."

Harry didn't get a chance to protest, as his girlfriend darted through the wall. "Dammit. I didn't want her in there."

"Do you want me to go after her?" Remus offered, his wand still moving as he continued to do as Harry had told him.

Harry shook his head. "Stay here. I need you to go on with erecting anti-apparition and anti-portkey wards of our own. Cass knew I wouldn't need two people for that."

Inside the wizarding section, Cassandra came to an abrupt halt at the sight that met her eyes. Bodies of both Aurors and Death Eaters littered the floor; her father and a Death Eater were engaged in an all-out fight, blood pouring down Sirius' face, and the Death Eater holding what was obviously a broken arm to her body; H.J. was lying on the floor, and a very recognizable figure was aiming a wand at him.

Cassandra felt her heart lurch as Dominus began to incant the killing curse. Hoping she was in time, Cassandra took aim. "Reducto."

Intent on killing H.J., Thomas didn't register the familiar voice casting the Reducto spell until it was too late, and, before he could do anything about it, the spell hit him in the back; the final syllable of the killing curse dying on his lips.

Across the room, Lily saw Cassandra's spell hit Thomas, and she immediately broke off her duel with Sirius to apparate to Thomas'

side. As Lily vanished, and Thomas began to collapse to the ground, Cassandra and Sirius both aimed at Thomas at the same time; Cassandra sending another Reducto spell, and Sirius a killing curse. Being closer, Cassandra's spell connected first, hitting Lily in the stomach as she reappeared in front of Thomas before the spell could hit him. As Lily landed on top of Thomas, she operated her emergency portkey, and the two of them vanished, leaving the green killing curse to connect with the wall instead.

Sirius swore. "Fuck it."

Pale and shaking, Cassandra could feel her heart pounding in her chest as she ran over to H.J., who didn't respond when she tried to enervate him. Cassandra activated his medical ring, hoping that Remus hadn't managed to get the wards up yet. He hadn't, and H.J. vanished. "Are there any other Death Eaters still here?"

"I don't know." Sirius limped over to Cassandra. "But I think it might be a good idea if we check to see if anyone is still alive, and then we should get out of here, just in case there are."

Just as Cassandra had run into the wizarding section of the Museum, deeper inside of it, Rupert finished floating the last of the Cartouches into the final wooden box that had been constructed for their transportation, before attaching a portkey to it. He turned to Regulus, who was keeping guard, and Lucius, who'd been ordered to take Thomas' place in assisting Rupert. "That's it. We should check on Dominus and the others."

"You should both go with the Cartouches, and make sure they arrive safely." Regulus ordered. "I'll go and see where Dominus has gotten to." Regulus then directed his team to follow him, and they headed back towards the main entrance.

About to start checking on people, Sirius and Cassandra both span around as a group of Death Eaters came running into the area they were in. "Cassandra, go." Sirius intended to leave the moment he knew that Cassandra was safely out of the room.

At the same time, seeing that Thomas had obviously left, Regulus issued an order to his own men. "Everyone out. I'll deal with this pair."

Obedying the consecutive orders, everyone vanished, leaving just Regulus and Sirius alone.

In the Muggle section, Cassandra looked around in panic. "Where's Dad?" She then tried to apparate back, only for nothing to happen. "Uncle Remus, drop the wards."

Harry wasn't about to let Remus do that. "Don't do it, Remus. Cass, what happened?"

"We were overrun." Cassandra hurriedly explained. "Dad told me to leave, so I did. Why didn't he leave as well?"

"He obviously waited to make sure you'd gotten out. The wards must have gone up in the split second after you apparated." Harry told her.

Cassandra turned a stricken face on Remus. "Dad's all alone in there with almost ten men, Uncle Remus. Drop the wards. I can't leave him alone."

"I'm sorry, Cass, but he can't." Harry refused on Remus' behalf, and as Cassandra lifted her wand, Remus turned his own on her. "Stupefy." Cassandra crumpled; Remus catching her before she hit the ground. "She's not going to be happy with us when she comes to."

"She'd have tried to bring the wards down if you hadn't done that, and Sirius would have killed us if we'd let her return." Harry wasn't looking forward to Cassandra's wrath, but he decided that he'd rather face that than having to deal with her death. "Check her left pocket. I need her cell phone."

Remus slid his hand into Cassandra's pocket and withdrew the phone, before tossing it to Harry, who called one of the Aurors in the Muggle section, telling him what he wanted.

Back inside the wizarding section, having seen Cassandra and his men vanish, and not wanting to engage his injured brother in a fight, Regulus decided to leave as well, only for nothing to happen.

Sirius smirked as he realized that someone had erected wards to stop anyone left inside the wizarding section from leaving. As the Death Eater facing him hadn't been able to apparate out, Sirius correctly deduced that it was someone from his side that had done so. "I think you'll find that we control this area now, so you're going nowhere except to Azkaban. My men will be here shortly to take you in."

The two men began to circle each other; Regulus addressing Sirius. "I suggest you yield; you're in no condition to take me on."

"I think you'll find you're wrong." Sirius sent a stunning spell at Regulus; he wanted to capture this one, not kill him.

Regulus avoided it, sending the same spell back at Sirius. "You're not going to beat me in your condition, so hand over your wand, and I'll let you live."

"Strangely enough I don't believe you." Sirius sent another stunning spell at Regulus, who again avoided it. "Why don't you hand over your wand, and I'll let you live. You know that you're not going to get out of here, so you may as well give up."

"You might be surprised." Regulus sent a petrification spell at Sirius.

Sirius couldn't understand why the Death Eater wasn't trying to kill him, and he increased the severity of his own spells; aiming to wound as he was still intent on capture rather than killing. "Reducto."

Regulus ducked as the spell sailed over his right shoulder. "Desino Pectus." Regulus knew that he could revive Sirius if the spell hit him.

Sirius hurriedly erected a shield to stop the heart-stopping spell from connecting. "Excrucio Maximus."

Regulus too erected a shield, as he had no wish for the derivative of the Cruciatus curse to hit him. "You're not going to give up, are you? Imperio."

Having been trained to shake off the curse, Sirius quickly freed himself of its effects, and sent the same pain spell at Regulus again. "Excrucio Maximus."

The spell bounced off Regulus' shield once more. "Nebulosus." Instead of returning fire, Regulus grinned as he turned his wand on himself and, as the fog he'd created covered him, he transformed.

Sirius promptly erected a shield, before casting a spell to cut through the fog. When it dispelled, he wasn't surprised to find that the Death Eater had totally vanished. "I know you're here somewhere."

From behind a fallen Auror, a small black hamster watched as Sirius searched for him.

Sirius tried to determine where the Death Eater might have gotten to, and attempted to apparate across the room but failed. He knew then that the Death Eater couldn't have apparated or portkeyed anywhere in the wizarding section, as the wards in place had obviously been set up to stop any type of transportation whatsoever, including within the area they encompassed. "You can't portkey or apparate, so I know you're still in here."

Regulus didn't move as Sirius next cast a spell to detect anyone who was disillusioned. Finding no-one, Sirius scanned the room slowly, catching sight of what looked like a small black furry head. Acting as if he hadn't seen it, he continued to circle the room, turning his back on the hamster. "You can't hide forever." The moment the words were out of his mouth, Sirius pivoted back round, and turned his wand on the small creature, casting the first spell he needed. "Claudo Animagus."

Regulus bolted, as he realized that Sirius had trapped him in his Animagus form. It was now Sirius' turn to grin as he casually aimed at the fleeing rodent. "Stupefy."

As Regulus collapsed unconscious, Sirius slowly walked over to where Regulus lay, before bending down and pocketing the hamster. He then started to check to see if anyone was still alive. A few minutes later the wards were breached by a small hole, and Sirius was joined by the teams Harry had requested. Cassandra, who'd been enervated by Remus, was at the rear of the second team. "Dad." She began to run across the room, only to stop when Sirius frowned at her before turning away.

Sirius continued to ignore Cassandra as he dealt with the most pressing issues. "Medicus Instanter Julianne Solace. Medicus Instanter Jonathan Moran." Only after he'd dealt with getting out the two Aurors he'd found alive so far, did Sirius turn to deal with his daughter. "I'm fine, Auror Black. Please help to check for any other survivors and prisoners." With that, Sirius limped out to join Harry.

Castrum House

Lucius addressed the young man in front of him. "I'm sorry to say that your mother has been seriously injured, Harry. As I know that Severus has no idea that Lily is a Death Eater, you have some decisions to make about what you're going to tell him."

Harry Potter then informed Lucius that Severus wouldn't be a problem. "Father is at a potions conference in Brazil; he's taken Silas with him, and Felicia is staying with her friend. They're all due back at the end of the week, just before school starts again. If Father firecalls, I can always say that Mum is doing some sort of experiment and can't be disturbed. Where is she now?"

"In her room upstairs." Lucius took Harry's arm, and apparated him to Lily's side. "Her main injury is a Reducto curse that hit her stomach which required surgery. It's going to take several days to heal, and Healer Rivers doesn't think moving her is a good idea. She won't wake until tomorrow as he's keeping her sedated."

“I’ll go home to Snape Manor.” Harry decided, feeling better now that he could see that Lily was alive and would be alright. “Can I come back and see Mum tomorrow?”

“You can.” Lucius confirmed. “Someone will contact you if there’s a problem in the meantime.”

“Thank you, Sir.” With that, Harry left the room. Lucius gave Lily a fleeting glance before apparating to Thomas’ rooms. “Rivers, how is he?”

“The Reducto curse breached his heart, and blew a large hole through his lung.” Rivers revealed. “He’s lucky to be alive. If Lily hadn’t taken that second Reducto for him, and portkeyed him out when she did, he’d have died.” Lily had been able to fill the healer in on what had happened before she’d been sedated.

“He’s supposed to be giving a press conference tomorrow. I take it that’s out of the question now?” Lucius asked tersely of the only other man, apart from the Inner Circle, who knew Thomas’ true identity.

“Not unless he’s capable of giving it unconscious.” Rivers remarked in a dry voice. “Thomas is going to be out of things for at least the next four or five days. His lung has to be re-grown, and that will take over 48 hours, as I had to vanish his original one as it was too badly damaged to save. And his heart can’t be placed under any stress until it’s healed, which is why I’m keeping him artificially alive until I decide that it can cope.”

Lucius thought quickly. “In that case I have some work to do.” Lucius subsequently apparated out of Thomas’ rooms, and to his desired destination.

Next chapter: H.J. explains to Hermione what happened; Sirius interrogates his prisoner; Mione is puzzled by Thomas’ odd behavior.

And apologies for those expecting Severus to gets a nasty shock, and Harry and Sirius having a tough decision to make. I shouldn’t

have included these two things in the next chapter preview – I forgot to remove them, something I've now done.

Chapter 46: Frustration and Friendship

Ministry of Magic – 26th March 2005

After leaving Remus to take Harry to Sirius' home, as Harry had refused to return to St. Mungo's, Sirius apparated to the Ministry. Once inside, he headed for a cell where he placed the hamster he'd acquired onto a chair. Then, after taking out his wand, he recited a long list of spells in quick succession. "Liberatio Animagus; Mutatio Animagus; Accio Wands; Patesco Arma; Accio Arma; Enervate."

The now freed and reversed Regulus reached immediately for his wands, and then his knife, only to find them gone. "Why am I not surprised?"

Sirius ignored the comment, and sat down. "For the purposes of this interview, I should tell you that anything you say can be used in evidence against you. My name is Commander Sirius Black. Please state your own name for the records."

Regulus refused. "I'm not obliged to do that."

"I'm going to find out eventually." Sirius told him. "So you may as well give it now before I begin questioning you."

"I'm still not giving you my name." Regulus folded his arms. "So fire away with your questions, not that I'm necessarily going to answer them as I've done nothing wrong."

Sirius resisted the temptation to snort. "In that case, if you've got nothing to hide, perhaps you'd like to take off the mask."

Regulus once again refused Sirius' request. "I don't believe there's a law against wearing a mask in public or private, so I'm not going to take it off."

Sirius was frustrated but hid it. "So you are refusing to give me your name, answer my questions or to remove the mask?"

"That is correct." Regulus knew his brother well enough to know that he was angry with him.

Sirius got up. "In the light of your refusal to co-operate, you will be removed from here to a high security cell at Azkaban."

Regulus was unfazed by Sirius' comment. "What are the charges?"

"Kidnapping..." Sirius didn't get any further when Regulus challenged him.

"Of whom?" Regulus knew that Sirius was talking about Cassandra.

"Cassandra Black and Camille Sebastian." Sirius informed him. "You were part of the group that abducted them on 23rd December 2004 from the Del Coronado Hotel in San Diego."

"How do you know that?" Regulus knew he was about to trip Sirius up.

"I saw Auror Sebastian's and Auror Black's memories of the event." Sirius informed him.

"And they can identify me how exactly?" Regulus set the trap.

Sirius realized what Regulus was doing, and had little choice but to spring the trap. "From your mask."

"That won't stand up in court." Regulus said smugly. "Just because two people were kidnapped by someone wearing a similar mask to the one I'm currently wearing, it doesn't mean that it was me. And while I'm aware that it doesn't prove that it wasn't, the onus is on you to prove without a shadow of a doubt that it was, and we both know you can't."

"Would you be willing to undergo Veritaserum?" Sirius played the only card he now had available to him.

"Be my guest." Regulus was impervious to it, having built up immunity over time. "But you'll need to let me have a wand. I need to shrink my mask to take it, and it's something only I can do."

"I'm afraid I'm not giving you a wand." Sirius couldn't take the chance that Regulus would try to escape.

"In that case, you'll be forfeiting your right to use Veritaserum on me." Regulus pointed out. "I have stated my willingness to submit to it, but unless you give me a wand, I'm afraid that by default you will surrender the right to question me using that forum."

Sirius was stuck between a rock and a hard place. Taking out his own wand, he opened the door and called two more Aurors into the room. "He needs to shrink his mask. If he makes a wrong move, stun him."

Regulus took the proffered wand that Sirius held out, and tapped his mask once, before handing the wand back over. "See. There was no need for the dramatics."

Sirius turned to the Aurors. "Thank you. Dismissed." Sirius then moved to administer the Veritaserum, Regulus holding out his tongue obediently.

Sirius began questioning him. "Please state your name."

Regulus decided to give the name that Cammie had christened him with when she hadn't known what else to call him during their lessons. "Teach."

"What kind of a name is Teach?" Sirius enquired.

"The only one you're going to get." Regulus responded smartly.

"Are you part of an illegal group?" Sirius enquired.

"Define 'illegal group'." Regulus smirked as he responded, not answering as Sirius expected him to.

Sirius knew then that he wasn't going to get a straight answer, so he used the same tactics as Regulus. "By your own definition, are you part of an illegal group?"

"Yes." Regulus answered truthfully. "But I hardly think being part of the Muggle Baiting Society is going to get me a spell in Azkaban."

Sirius continued to ask question after question, ending up completely frustrated as Regulus avoided answering directly despite the Veritaserum that had been administered. In the end Sirius had little choice but to administer the antidote. "Very well, the charges for the time being are: attacking an officer of British Auror Division; being involved in a robbery; using an Unforgivable..."

"None of which are grounds for incarceration in a high security cell in Azkaban." Regulus let a self-satisfied smile cross his lips. "Now let's break this down. As for your first charge, you failed to identify yourself as an officer of BritAD, Commander Black. Not only that, but I also offered you a chance to put down your weapon; and if I remember correctly, you fired the first spell, and it was you who used more and more powerful spells as we went along. I only used the Unforgivable as a matter of self-defense. As for the charge of robbery, what exactly am I supposed to have stolen? Did you find any stolen merchandise on me? I don't think so." Regulus sat up and leant forward. "Now I could sit here and poke even more holes than I already have through every single charge you've just brought up against me, but I have things I need to get done. So why don't I cut to the chase, and institute my right to demand a hearing before the Wizengamot?"

"Please excuse me." Sirius apparated out to his house, where Harry was tucked up in bed, sleeping. Sirius woke him up, apologized for doing so, and then told gave Harry a brief description of what had happened in the Museum, and the conversation he'd just had with the prisoner, as well as a description of him. "I wanted to add the charges for my attempted kidnapping and attack, but he's going to stonewall me that with the same 'prove it was me' excuse. Ideas?"

“You’re fucked.” Harry calmly informed Sirius. “The SOB obviously knows his rights, and there’s little you can do, except to present him before the Wizengamot as he’s asked. However, I’m almost willing to bet that he’s going to walk.”

“But he was in the wizarding section of the Museum, Harry.” Sirius was starting to get angry. “He attacked me.”

“He could have been a visitor; he could have picked the mask up; he could have been defending a class outing.” Harry knew that his last example was far-fetched but he was trying to make a point. “You’ve just said that from the cut of his clothes he’s obviously from a wealthy background, which means that he’s going to get himself a good lawyer; a lawyer that he’s entitled to as you can’t prove that he’s a terrorist. You said yourself that he used only simple spells on you until you began to get more severe with your own, and you’ve just admitted that you didn’t identify yourself. There are a thousand and one arguments his lawyer can make, Sirius.”

Sirius wanted to punch the wall. “I am such a fucking idiot. I walked straight into his fucking trap like a fucking green cadet.”

“I think your best option is not to bring all the charges against him that we know he’s guilty of when he goes before the Wizengamot. If he’s acquitted of the charges against you, and against Cassandra, then you won’t be able to use them against him again. So I suggest that you just bring the charges related to the Museum break in up.” Harry decided. “You’re going to have to let the bastard walk, Sirius, and hope that the next time you bring him in, you have more concrete evidence to link him to the crimes we both know he’s guilty of.”

“It stinks.” Sirius was now pacing up and down. “It absolutely fucking stinks.”

“I know, but you’d better convene the Wizengamot, otherwise I wouldn’t put it past the bastard to sue BritAD for failing to adhere to his rights.” Harry knew that he’d be as angry as Sirius if he hadn’t been so exhausted. “Wake me when you get back.”

Sirius felt a little guilty at waking Harry but he'd wanted a levelheaded sounding board, and Harry was most definitely that. "It can wait until you wake naturally. I'd best get back."

Harry closed his eyes again, and was asleep almost as soon as Sirius left the room.

Sirius reappeared in the holding cell half an hour later. "I've arranged for the Wizengamot to convene at their earliest convenience..."

Regulus cut Sirius off. "I don't think so. I demand a convention now. I know that a quorum of two-thirds of the Wizengamot can be found at short notice; most of them will be at home celebrating Easter. If you don't do it, I'm sure my lawyer can."

"Very well." Sirius relented knowing that Regulus was right. "I'll arrange for the hearing for this afternoon."

"See, that wasn't too difficult, was it, Commander Black?" Regulus stretched lazily. "I'd also like for you to contact my lawyer, Stefan Popham, and I want to see him before the hearing."

"He'll be here within the hour." Sirius had little choice but to acquiesce to Regulus' demands.

"Thank you." Regulus could feel the frustration rolling off his brother. "I'll see you in court, Commander Black."

Sirius didn't answer and vanished, leaving a smiling Regulus alone.

St. Mungo's

H.J. opened his eyes to find Hermione sitting next to his bed. "Hi."

"Hi." Hermione gently stroked her husband's face. "You gave me quite a scare. Cassandra phoned to explain why she was missing, and to tell me that you'd been brought here."

“I didn’t mean to ruin your weekend.” H.J. apologized. “Were you having a good time?”

“Not really.” Hermione admitted. “I missed you.”

“I missed you too.” H.J. lifted his hand, and took Hermione’s fingers that were caressing his cheek, and gently pressed a kiss to them.

“Why did you go after him, Harry?” Hermione used H.J.’s proper name as she quite often did if she was upset or angry. “Isn’t it enough that I’ve lost Cammie to him, without losing you too?”

“I had to.” H.J. winced as he sat up, as despite being treated for his injuries, his ribs were still hurting from the crushing spell that Dominus had placed on him. “He took my baby away from me, and I wanted to hurt him for that.”

“Instead he ended up hurting you.” Hermione brushed away a tear that had gathered in the corner of her left eye. “If it hadn’t been for Cassandra, you’d be dead.”

H.J. had passed out after the crushing spell had cut off his oxygen, and therefore had no idea what had gone on after that point. “I owe her a life debt then.”

“She’s already renounced it.” Hermione had been glad of Cassandra’s support when she’d arrived at St. Mungo’s, as the young woman had gotten her through the security checkpoints as quickly as possible so that she could be with H.J. “She thinks they’re archaic.”

“So what happened?” H.J. sat up.

“You tell me first.” Hermione demanded.

“Someone had obviously told Dominus I was there. He singled me out after dispatching two of the Aurors as if they were paper.” As Dominus had stormed into the room, H.J. had almost been knocked off his feet by the blasting spell he’d only just managed to defend

against. "I wouldn't have lasted as long as I did against him, if Sirius hadn't been capable of taking on both Dominus and the woman he was fighting."

"Sirius took on Dominus?" Hermione hadn't heard about that. "But I thought that Dominus could easily beat Sirius."

"He didn't take him on face to face." H.J. corrected Hermione's misconception. "Sirius kept firing off the odd spell at Dominus while he engaged a female Death Eater who seemed to have it in for Sirius. Doing that helped to keep Dominus off guard but I also felt as if Dominus was playing with me. He knew that he was going to beat me easily. If he'd wanted to, I think he could have killed me far sooner than he intended to. What I don't understand is why Dominus didn't just take out Sirius as he had done with the other Aurors. It's almost as if he was letting the woman have him."

"Perhaps she has a grudge against Sirius." Hermione suggested, not knowing how right she was.

"Whatever the reason, it obviously saved my life." H.J. asked after Cassandra. "How badly did Cassandra get hurt?"

"She didn't." Hermione explained what Cassandra had told her. "Dominus was leaning over you casting the killing curse, and Cassandra sent a Reducto curse at him. The curse went straight through Dominus' back; Cassandra is hoping that he's dead. But the woman managed to portkey both herself and Dominus out, but not before Cassandra hit her with a Reducto curse as well."

"Cassandra was quite the star wasn't she?" H.J. remarked.

"She was." Hermione then told H.J. the rest of the news. "So is Sirius. He caught a Death Eater; he's interrogating him now."

H.J.'s face lit up. "Let's hope that Sirius will get a useful lead of some kind."

“I hope so too.” Hermione turned around as the door opened, and she smiled at the man standing there. “Healer Griffiths, I expect you want to check H.J. over.”

“I do indeed.” The healer headed into the room, and all conversation about what had happened came to a halt.

Later that evening

Sirius arrived home, and sat down next to his wife. “Well that went as badly as I expected it to.”

“He walked, didn’t he?” Faith took Sirius’ hand and laced her fingers between his.

“Twenty minutes. Twenty fucking minutes, and he was free.” Sirius had been unable to make anything stick, as the lawyer Regulus had employed had blown every single argument Sirius had used out of the water. “And I’m still none the wiser as to who the hell the Death Eater is.”

“I’m sorry, Dad.” Cassandra, who’d decided to stay at Sirius’ house overnight, commiserated with her father. “I was watching from the viewing balcony. I’ve seen Popham before. He’s a brilliant criminal lawyer, and an expensive one, so I’m willing to hazard a guess that whoever the Death Eater is, he’s rich and a pureblood. Popham’s an elitist who doesn’t exactly hide his beliefs, and there’s no way he’d take a half-blood or a Muggleborn on as a client. It’s a pity you couldn’t drag the truth out of Popham, as he obviously knows who’s hiding behind that mask.”

“Unfortunately our legal system won’t allow me to do that. And even knowing Popham’s reputation, it doesn’t exactly help to identify who the Death Eater was, but I suppose it does narrow down the field slightly.” Sirius was aware that despite Cassandra’s supposition, it really wouldn’t help him that much as rich purebloods, although in a minority, still numbered in the hundreds. “I thought he might have been Malfoy, but I spotted him in the balcony sitting with his wife several rows behind you.”

“I overheard someone say that Narcissa is pregnant.” Cassandra had caught a few words of a whispered conversation, that wasn’t quite as quiet as the orator had probably intended it to be. “It didn’t seem long to replace their son.”

“Malfoy needs an heir, so the news isn’t exactly surprising.” Sirius still wasn’t quite sure that Draco’s death in a supposed charms experiment had been an accident, but he also hadn’t been able to prove otherwise, as Lucius had sworn on oath that his son’s body had been destroyed by a spell to which he didn’t know the counter, which is why there had been no body to examine.

“Do you want something to eat?” Faith doubted whether Sirius had eaten since breakfast.

“I’m not hungry.” Sirius got up. “I think I just want to go to bed, and hope I wake up to find the world’s a different place.”

After bidding her father and Faith goodnight, Cassandra made her way up to Harry’s room. Opening the door, she found that he was still sleeping, or so she thought as she stood in the doorway.

Harry opened one eye. “Have you come to talk to me, or to berate me?”

“Neither. I just wanted to check on you before I went to bed.” Cassandra answered shortly as she walked closer to the bed.

“You’re still angry about what I did this morning aren’t you?” Harry lay looking up at Cassandra.

“You’re damn right I am.” Cassandra informed him. “You could have killed Dad, Harry.”

“He’d have done the same thing if it had had been me.” Harry defended himself.

“No, he wouldn’t have.” Cassandra argued.

She was interrupted by a voice from behind her. "Yes, I would have." Sirius entered through the door that Cassandra had left open. "Harry was following protocol, and if he'd let you bring down the wards, I'd have nailed him to the wall for it. Harry was being an Auror first, and a friend second, and that's the way it should be."

"So you were doing the same when you let me leave first?" Cassandra jumped on what she thought was a good argument.

"I was." Sirius informed her. "I was in charge of those teams, and it was my duty to make sure that everyone who could get out, was out, and that included you. I'd have done it no matter who'd been left in there with me."

Cassandra visibly deflated. "So it wasn't because I'm your daughter?"

"A little of it was, but I was also following protocol." Sirius answered his daughter honestly. "Which, if you'd had the field training I'd intended for you to have with the Muggle Investigations team, you'd have known."

Cassandra sat on the edge of Harry's bed. "Sorry, Dad."

"It's not me you should be apologizing to." Sirius kissed Cassandra's cheek. "So apologize to Harry, and then go to bed; and by bed, I mean your own bed."

Cassandra waited for Sirius to close the door, before turning to Harry. "I'm sorry."

"I understand, Cass." Harry took Cassandra's hand. "You were frightened of losing Sirius; it was an entirely natural reaction which is why neither your Dad nor I will be disciplining you over this."

"Would you have disciplined me if I'd been someone else?" Cassandra asked.

"Yes." Harry admitted.

“Then you’re showing favoritism.” Cassandra hated nepotism.

“In that case, Auror Black, you’re on night desk duty for a week.” Harry wasn't in the mood to play games.

“You’re really going to discipline me?” Cassandra was completely taken aback by Harry’s speedy response.

“You can't have it both ways, Cass. You either want to be treated like everyone else or you don't.” Harry yawned. “Now as much as I’d love to talk to you, I’m done in.”

“And you’re kicking me out?” Cassandra couldn't believe what she was hearing.

“I am. Goodnight, Cass.” Harry closed his eyes.

Cassandra stood there as Harry’s breathing evened out almost immediately. “He bloody well fell asleep on me.” With that, she walked out of the room to find Sirius leaning up against the wall, waiting for her. “You were checking to see that I’d gone to bed?”

“While I know that you sleep with Harry, it doesn’t mean that I’m going to allow in my house, Cassie.” Sirius pushed away from the wall. “Did you apologize to him?”

Cassandra nodded. “And I’m on night desk duty all next week. I stupidly told Harry that he was showing favoritism by not punishing me, so he disciplined me.”

Sirius burst out laughing at his daughter’s indignant face. “Just be glad he decided to overlook the warning on your record from the USAD fiasco, and that he didn’t bust you back to a third year trainee. Now before you wreak any further havoc, I suggest you get off to bed.”

Cassandra hesitated. “Dad, what do you think happened to Dominus?”

“I don’t know.” Sirius put his arm around Cassandra’s shoulders as he led her towards the room that he still kept for her. “After watching your memory of what happened, that was a hell of a hole you blew through him. If he’s not dead, then I’d say he’s in pretty bad shape somewhere.”

“I suppose it’s too much to wish him dead, isn’t it?” Cassandra asked.

“Yes, but one can only hope.” Sirius kissed Cassandra’s cheek yet again. “Night, Cassie.”

“Night, Dad.” Cassandra let herself into her bedroom, and closed the door behind her.

Castrum House

Regulus poured himself a very large scotch as he sat down next to Lucius. “So who is best suited to taking Thomas’ place?”

“I think you are.” Lucius suggested. “I was going to get Rupert to do it, but as a lawyer, you’re more used to public speaking than he is.”

“Then it’s a good job that I got out then, isn’t it?” Regulus finished the scotch. “I know that Thomas had told Mione that he was going to be unavailable tonight, but he also he didn’t foresee himself being injured. As Mione is in New York, hopefully I can put off seeing her until Monday night.”

“I’d also put off any bedroom activities when you do.” Lucius remarked wryly.

“As attractive as Mione is, I know better than to play with fire.” Regulus got up. “I’ll check on Thomas, and then I’m going to bed.”

The Next Day

Harry reviewed the memories of both Cassandra, and then Sirius. His mouth fell open as he spotted the Animagus that Sirius had captured. "I wish you'd shown me this yesterday."

"Why?" Sirius couldn't see what difference it would have made.

"I'm sorry, Sirius but that Death Eater is your brother." Harry would have recognized the black hamster anywhere.

"Regulus?" Sirius shook his head. "You can't be right."

"Dae's Animagus form was a cute black hamster." Harry scratched his head, as another memory he couldn't quite get a handle on, tickled at the outer edge of his mind. After a few moments, he became aware that Sirius was looking impatiently at him. "Sorry, my mind wandered for a moment. I'll show you." Harry emerged from the pensieve before pulling one of his own memories out and dropping it in. Lying back on the bed, he let Sirius go in alone.

Sirius emerged from the pensieve a few minutes later, pale and shaken. "If you're right, then Regulus took Cassie, as well as being part of the group who tried to kill me."

"And it would also mean that Bill Weasley and Thomas Seville are a part of this." Harry recalled that the three men had used each other as alibis during Sirius' attack.

"Cassandra said that Thomas was giving a press conference today about the new power plant, which is why Mione has scheduled the girls' weekend for now." Sirius looked at his watch. "I think we should watch the news later. After what Cassandra did to Dominus, if it is Thomas, then there's no way he'd be fit enough to hold the conference. If it's been cancelled we'll know."

It was just after midnight when Harry let Sirius apparate him to Cassandra's apartment, where Sirius switched on the large television, and soon found the news channel Cassandra had mentioned. A few minutes after switching the television on, a familiar face began expounding the benefits of the new, clean power that his company

was manufacturing; his voice smooth and compelling. Sirius let out the breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding. "Back to square one, Harry."

Harry could feel the relief from Sirius washing over him like waves. "I'm glad that I was wrong. Both for you and Mione." Harry, however, still had a niggling doubt but decided to let it go.

Sirius could see his hands shaking as he turned the television off. "I didn't think it could be Regulus as I checked him for the Dark Mark when we reconciled and found nothing, but you certainly had me worried."

Harry apologized. "Sorry, but you've got to admit they looked almost identical."

"You're right they did, but as my slippery friend proved yesterday, just because things look alike it doesn't mean that they are." Sirius took several large gulps of air as he steadied himself. "Have you been able to remember anything else about the woman who tortured you? I'd like to know if she's the same one I took on. After reviewing Cassie's memories, and what little you can remember, I think it is."

"So do I." Harry frowned as he tried to remember more about his own encounter with the woman. "It's really starting to get to me now. I can remember her coming in, but after the second knife she drove into me, everything is a pretty much a blur. As I said previously, I remember Cammie destroying my chains, and that's it."

"Craig did say that one of the poisons on the knife you brought back was a hallucinogenic, so perhaps that's why you're having problems." Sirius suggested. "Craig said that you should give it time, and that you might remember if you don't force it."

"It's just bloody frustrating that I can't remember." Harry closed his eyes. "And that I can't seem to stay awake for more than ten minutes at a time."

“You pushed yourself to the edge yesterday.” Sirius reminded him. “Bart said you’ve probably added at least another week onto your recovery time.”

Harry didn’t answer as he’d fallen asleep. Sirius smiled and pulled the blanket that sat on the back of Cassandra’s sofa off it, before draping it over Harry.

Los Angeles, California

Regulus walked away from the press conference, only to bump into Mione. “Mione, what are you doing here? I thought you were in New York.”

“Slight change of plans.” Mione then went on to tell the man she thought was Thomas what he already knew. “With the attack on the British Museum, everyone has gone home, so I thought I’d fly out here and see you instead.”

Regulus immediately lied. “I was actually heading for bed.”

“Sounds perfect.” Mione’s smile could have lit up a stadium. “I think I’ll join you.”

Regulus ran a finger along his collar as he suddenly felt as if he couldn’t breathe, and that his tie was strangling him. “I meant alone.”

“Oh.” Mione was totally taken aback, as she’d thought that Thomas had been dropping a hint. “But it’s only five in the afternoon. You can’t be that tired.”

“I was up all night revising the speech.” Regulus wasn’t lying totally; he had re-read and rehearsed the speech over and over again until it had flowed in a natural manner. “And I therefore didn’t get much sleep. I’ve also got a six o’clock meeting in the morning in New York.” He smiled brightly at Mione. “Look, Mione, as I’m absolutely exhausted, and wouldn’t be good company, why don’t you head home to London. I’m sure your friends will be glad of your company after what’s happened, and I’ll see you in London tomorrow night.”

A little hurt, but aware that perhaps she should be with her friends, Mione reluctantly decided to do what Thomas suggested. She therefore reached up to kiss him, only for Thomas to turn his head so that her lips found his cheek instead. "You're too tired to kiss me?"

"My lunch had garlic in it." Regulus blurted out the first thing that came to mind. "I thought it would help to keep the rabid press away from me."

Mione laughed, her anxiety vanishing. She kissed him again on the cheek. "I suggest that you brush your teeth then before you see me tomorrow night. I'll be home for dinner by six."

Regulus almost buckled with relief as Mione vanished.

It was only as Mione appeared in London that she realized that it was one in the morning, and all of her friends were now likely to be sleeping. "Thomas must have been more tired than he looked if he also didn't think about the time difference." Smiling at their mutual mistake, she headed up the stairs.

Castrum House

Harry Potter closed the door to his mother's room, and headed up the corridor, not really paying attention to where he was going. He was therefore taken unawares as he cannoned into a small, warm body. Annoyed, he snapped without thinking at the individual. "Watch where you're going." Anything else he was going to say died on his lips as he recognized the mask the person was wearing as belonging to Dominus' ward.

Cammie glanced up at the red-masked individual. "I'm sorry. It was my fault; I wasn't looking where I was walking, and I didn't expect to see anyone this late."

"I was visiting my mother." Harry told her. "Did I hurt you?"

"I think I twisted my ankle." Cammie could feel it throbbing.

“I’ll help you back to your rooms.” Wanting to make amends, Harry bent down, and hooked his arm around Cammie’s waist to help her to her feet.

“It’s actually the door behind you.” Cammie told him.

Harry opened the door, and supported the hopping girl into the room. “Sit down, and I’ll take a look at your ankle.”

Cammie leant back against the sofa as Harry undid her shoe, and slipped it off. “I can move it, so I don’t think I’ve broken it. I sprained it at the start of the year, and it’s been a little dodgy ever since then.”

Harry, although not knowing much about anatomy, had to agree with Cammie. “I think you’re right. I can cast a numbing spell, and a spell to take down the swelling.”

“Thanks, err...” Cammie wondered who was behind the apprentice’s mask. “I’m sorry, but I don’t know your name.”

“And I don’t know yours either.” Harry countered, without revealing who he was.

Cammie remembered Dominus’ warning not to reveal who she was; he’d promised her that it wouldn’t be Cammie who’d suffer for it if she did, but the person she told. “I can’t tell you mine.”

“And I’m not supposed to tell anyone mine either.” Harry got to his feet. “Will you be alright if I leave you alone?”

“Would you like something to drink?” Cammie was fed up being alone and not wanting Harry to leave, hurriedly blurted out the offer.

Wanting to leave but also aware that it was his fault that Cammie had injured herself, Harry found himself accepting Cammie’s offer. “I would.”

“Mitzy?” Cammie called out, and the house-elf that Dominus had given her appeared. “Can I have an orange juice, and my friend would like...?”

“Milk.” Harry filled in the blank as he sat down next to Cammie, and, copying her, tapped his mask so that it became a three-quarter length version enabling him to drink his beverage.

After they’d been served, Cammie glanced a little shyly at Harry. “Why were you visiting your Mum?”

“She was hurt yesterday at the Museum.” Harry explained.

“I’m sorry to hear that.” Cammie hadn’t yet realized exactly who Harry’s mother was. “Will she be alright?”

“Yes.” Harry suddenly became conscious that he wasn’t alone in knowing someone who’d been hurt. “I’m being a little thoughtless. I should have said that I was sorry to hear that your guardian was hurt as well.”

“Guardian?” Cammie was confused.

Harry was a little taken aback by Cammie’s response. “You are Dominus’ ward, aren’t you?”

Cammie had almost forgotten that Dominus had told her that that was what he’d told everyone she was for her own protection. “Yes, but I didn’t know he was hurt. Is it serious?”

“I thought someone would have told you.” Harry was unsure whether to tell Cammie now or not.

“I haven’t seen anyone since Dominus visited me yesterday morning.” Cammie hadn’t strayed out of her room until she’d bumped into Harry. “So, is it serious?”

“He’ll make a full recovery but he was badly hurt.” Harry revealed, as Cammie bit her lip. “Are you alright?”

Although she hated him for keeping her confined, being soft-hearted, Cammie couldn't help but feel a little troubled by Dominus' condition. "Yes, I'm fine."

Harry tentatively put an arm around her. "You can cry if you want to."

"I'm not going to cry." Cammie assured Harry, feeling more than a little relieved when he removed his arm. Afraid that her rescuer would go now that he'd made sure she was alright and he'd drunk his milk, Cammie hurriedly made another offer. "Would you like to play a game of chess? I've been bored all alone; but only if you don't have to be somewhere else." Cammie knew that the man in front of her was a Death Eater but, after really only speaking to Dominus and her teacher, she was glad to have someone new to spend time with.

"I'm really not very good." Harry, however, began to make his way over to where an ornately carved chess board with dragons and snakes was set up on a small circular table that boasted a chair on either side.

"I need the practice." Cammie sat down opposite Harry. "So what should I call you?"

"I don't know." Harry began to think of something she could call him, as he asked her the same question. "What should I call you?"

Cammie came up with a suggestion first. "How about Mie? My friends at school used to call me that."

Harry grinned. "In that case you can call me 'Hugh'."

"Mie and Hugh?" Cammie laughed out loud for the first time since she'd been taken.

"I couldn't resist." Harry moved his chess piece as he answered. "So did you go to Hogwarts?"

Cammie hesitated before responding. "I went to a school somewhere else."

"You obviously can't tell me." Harry guessed correctly. "When did you leave school?"

"Err, I haven't." Cammie knew then that Harry thought she was older than she was. "I'm only fourteen."

"Fourteen?" Harry had assumed she was older. "I didn't realize."

"I'm fifteen in September." Cammie quickly informed him. "How old are you?"

"Eighteen." Harry revealed. "I'll be nineteen in July."

"So you're not that much older than me." She didn't know why, but Cammie felt relieved. "So do you go to work?"

Harry shook his head. "I go to Manchester University."

"Wizarding or Muggle?" Cammie was aware that the University catered for both.

"Wizarding." Harry answered as he moved his knight into position. "I'm studying advanced history as my major, and a minor in potions."

"I suck at potions." Cammie admitted.

"I'm not exactly brilliant at them either." Harry had taken it because he'd been undecided what to take as a minor until Severus had offered to coach him for the potions minor.

"So what do you want to do when you finish University?" Cammie moved her queen to take Harry's bishop.

"I don't know yet." Harry had only decided to go to University as he hadn't been able to decide what career he wanted to pursue. "I know I don't want to be an Auror."

Cammie snorted. "A Death Eating Auror; how funny would that be?"

Harry's lips twitched. "You have a point."

Cammie became serious, and asked her next question a little nervously. "Hugh, have you ever..." She stopped, not sure whether she really wanted to know the answer.

"Have I ever what?" Harry hesitated, his hand over his knight.

"...killed anyone?" Cammie finished her sentence.

"No." Harry could see that his answer had reassured Cammie. "You seem relieved. I would have thought being Dominus' ward, you wouldn't be bothered."

"Just because I'm his ward doesn't mean that I like the idea of killing people." Cammie responded. "Are you his apprentice?" Cammie had asked Dominus what the significance of the red mask was, having seen Harry around the house a few times. He'd told her that it meant that the owner of the mask was an apprentice, but Dominus hadn't told her whose apprentice Harry was.

Harry shook his head. "No, I'm my mother's."

Cammie thought about the woman she'd stunned when she was rescuing her Uncle Harry, and knew from her mask that she was a high ranking Death Eater. She therefore wondered if this might be Harry's mother. "Is your mother a snake Animagus?"

"Yes, how did you know?" Harry moved his pawn to block Cammie's queen.

"She's the only high ranking Death Eater I know of." Cammie didn't offer more than that, and Harry simply assumed that Cammie had

seen his mother's Animagus as part of her position as Dominus' ward. He didn't realize that Cammie had been the one to stun his mother leading to her torture over the Christmas holiday. Cammie remained with the subject of Animagi. "Do you have an Animagus form?"

Harry nodded. "I'm a wolf."

"My..." Cammie stopped herself from blurting out what she was going to say about her Uncle Harry. "It doesn't matter."

"Were you going to tell me what your form was?" Harry guessed wrongly.

"No." Cammie castled as she prepared for her final moves. "I've never even tried to find my form."

"I can show you when we've finished playing." Harry didn't know why he'd offered; he'd intended to leave as soon as the game was over.

Cammie's smile became brilliant. "Really?"

"Or perhaps we'd better leave it until tomorrow." Harry glanced at the clock that sat on the mantelpiece. "It's almost ten."

"You'll come back tomorrow?" Cammie's voice was full of hope.

"If you want me to." Even though it was totally of character for him, Harry couldn't bring himself to disappoint the girl now that he'd made the offer.

"Yes, please." Cammie smiled as she watched Harry fall into her trap. She moved her queen. "Checkmate in two moves."

Harry scowled behind his mask and looked at the board. "I don't see it."

"Make your move." Cammie couldn't stop the triumphant smile that graced her lips.

Harry moved his knight to defend his king, and attack hers, as Cammie had expected him to. "Check."

Cammie moved her bishop. "Check."

Harry looked down at the board and groaned. "I concede."

"Told you." Cammie got up. "What time will you be here tomorrow?"

"I'm coming here after lunch." Harry informed her. "About two. But I need to see Mum first."

"Can we play chess again after you help me find my form?" Cammie asked, even though Harry didn't challenge her in the same way that Dominus did when they played together.

"If that's what you want to do." Harry tapped his mask, and it returned to its full length. "I'll see you about two-thirty."

"I'll see you then." Cammie locked the door after Harry had left. Dominus had told her that only his Inner Circle were allowed to apparate in or come up to the level she lived on; even so, for her own peace of mind, Cammie always locked her door both the Muggle way, and using the spell that Dominus had taught her, completely unaware that the spell was actually grounded in Dark Magic.

Smiling to herself that perhaps she'd finally found a friend, Cammie headed to bed.

Next chapter: Thomas learns about Regulus' deception of Mione, and of Cammie's new friendship; Sirius finds Harry and Cassandra in a compromising position. The next update will probably be in a week or so as I am still writing it.

Chapter 47: Explanations

Monday, 28th March 2005

Cammie got up from the sofa. "I didn't expect to find my form on the first attempt."

"You're lucky." Harry also got up and headed to the chess board. "It took me three attempts."

"I have to admit that I was worried." Cammie let Harry pull out her chair for her. "I imagined I'd be something lame like a duck or a bunny."

"Well there's nothing to be sneezed about at being a deer." Harry knew his Dad wouldn't disagree with his statement.

"I'm glad I found my form but I know that it's still a long way off from being able to change." Cammie's tone was wistful as she made the first move.

Harry thought more carefully than usual about the move he was going to make. He could see that he had thrown Cammie when he moved his knight out instead of moving a pawn. "I'll help you if you want but I have to return to University at the end of the week."

Cammie's delight was obvious. "If you wouldn't mind, I'd be really grateful."

Harry turned his attention back to the game at hand, wondering what on earth had possessed him to make the offer, and he responded a little gruffly as he made his latest move. "It's no big deal."

The game continued in silence with Cammie once again easily beating Harry. Harry then stayed for a few more hours talking to Cammie about the basics of becoming an Animagus. When he finally left, he agreed to return the next day.

Thursday

Thomas groaned. His entire body hurt as he opened his eyes and reached up to take off the mask no-one else had been able to remove. "Painkiller would be good."

Timothy Rivers smiled down at Thomas as he passed over the requested item. "You're a very lucky man, Thomas. I wasn't exactly sure at first whether I'd be able to save you."

Thomas couldn't deny the relief that flooded through him as the pain potion did its job. "How long have I been out?"

"It's Thursday." Regulus informed him as Rivers left. "You'd have either been out longer or been dead if it hadn't been for Lily. She took a Reducto curse for you. She's in her room recovering as well."

Thomas was aware that he now owed Lily a life debt. Knowing her as he did, he had a feeling that she would be requesting something from him; something he'd be unable to deny her. "Who did it?"

Regulus' response was hesitant. "My niece."

"Cassandra did this?" Thomas knew it was a stupid comment, but the words slipped out before he could stop himself. "So much for her not being able to attack someone in cold-blood!"

"It wasn't in cold-blood. According to Lily, you'd already begun to incant the killing curse; Cassandra was defending H.J." Regulus hoped that Thomas wouldn't target his niece again.

"You're afraid I'm going to go after her again, aren't you?" Thomas knew what was troubling Regulus. When Regulus nodded, he continued. "I won't, unless she places herself in a situation where I have no other choice. Cassandra wasn't supposed to have been hurt when she taken last December, so I believe we're now even." Having made that decision, Thomas decided that he could now push aside any unwelcome feelings of guilt about what had happened to Cassandra. His throat dry, Thomas began to cough.

Regulus handed over a glass of water. "I'd say you're even, seeing as Rivers had to re-grow your lung, and artificially suspend you, as the curse damaged your heart as well."

Even though Rivers had said it had been a close thing, Thomas hadn't realized how badly he'd been injured. "She really did do a number on me, didn't she?"

Regulus nodded. "Almost as good as the one Sirius did on me."

"You were hurt?" Thomas asked.

"No, captured." Regulus then told Thomas what had transpired. "I have Stefan to thank for my release."

"If it ever happens again, might I suggest that you just let your men kill your brother, as I doubt you'll walk free a second time." Thomas remarked in a dry voice. "So how did you cover this up with Mione?"

This was one conversation that Regulus really didn't want to have. "I took your place."

"I beg your pardon?" Thomas' voice became low and silky. "You slept with my wife?"

Regulus hurried to disabuse Thomas of his concern before he ended up dead. "Of course not. I gave the press conference for you, and Mione turned up there as, after what happened, the weekend with her girlfriends was cancelled."

"And...?" Thomas' voice was still low and deadly.

Regulus knew he was in deep shit if he didn't hurry up and explain. "I did everything I could to avoid her, and..."

"Give me my wand." Thomas demanded as he interrupted Regulus' nervous explanation.

Regulus felt a bead of sweat run down his back as he handed over the wand, and he waited for some form of punishment. Instead he heard the word 'Legilimens' ring out.

Thomas searched Regulus' mind; the memories he was looking for at the forefront.

Monday Night

Regulus opened the door to Thomas' bedroom, and stopped. "Mione, I didn't expect to see you here."

Mione looked strangely at Thomas. "Where else would I be at this time of night?"

It was then Regulus realized that, unlike him and his wife, Thomas and Mione obviously shared Thomas' bedroom on a permanent basis. He hastily covered up his faux pas. "I didn't mean to imply that you shouldn't be in my bed; it's just that I didn't expect you to be up here yet."

Mione had informed him that she'd be working late on her report. "I decided the report could wait. We haven't had much time alone lately, and I therefore decided that you were more important." She gave a naughty smile. "So why," at this point Mione got out of bed, "don't you join me in the shower?"

Regulus felt his mouth go dry at the sight of Mione in a very short lilac nightgown. "I can't. I, err, completely forgot about a report of my own that's due tomorrow. Why don't you get back into bed, and I'll be up as soon as I finish it?"

Mione frowned. "You forgot about a report?"

Regulus tried to act nonchalant. "I had other things that needed doing and I simply forgot about it. But it's important, Mione. It's about the power plant, and I really have to get it done for tomorrow."

Mione's shoulders drooped dejectedly. "I understand. I'll wait up for you."

“Hopefully it won’t take too long.” With that, Regulus fled. He knew that if Mione managed to stay awake, she would be waiting up for a very long time.

The next morning Mione woke up to find Thomas pulling on his jacket. “I didn’t hear you come to bed.”

“You were sleeping.” Regulus lied. He had spent the night on the sofa in Thomas’ study, only coming upstairs to shower and dress. “I’ll see you at breakfast.”

After getting ready, Mione found that Thomas had already eaten. “You’re in a hurry, aren’t you?”

“Places to go.” Regulus dropped a quick kiss on Mione’s cheek and hurried into the hallway before apparating out.

Tuesday Night

Regulus smiled and chatted happily to Mione, before disappearing to top up the polyjuice potion he was taking. He also checked, for the fourth time, that he had the vial of sleeping potion in his pocket. On returning to the dining room, he suggested that they should go and sit down in the drawing room. “I’ll pour you a glass of wine.”

“Thanks.” Mione sat down on the sofa, so that Thomas could sit by her.

Regulus carefully palmed the vial, and then slipped the contents of it into Mione’s wineglass, before handing the glass to her. “So how was your day?”

Mione didn’t initially answer his question as she took a few sips of the wine. “Is this a different wine than usual?”

“Yes, I thought I’d try something new.” Regulus just hoped that she’d drink it.

“I think I prefer my usual Pinot Grigio, but this is okay.” Mione took another mouthful. “So in answer to your question my day was...” Mione hesitated and yawned. “Sorry, I’m more tired than I thought.”

Regulus sat down, pleased to see Mione take yet another sip of the wine. “So, you were trying to tell me about your day.”

“Oh yes.” Mione could feel her eyelids getting heavier. “It was busy. You?”

Regulus wanted her to take just a little more wine. “Busy. Mione, just so I don’t order any more wine like that one, what is it exactly you don’t like about it?”

Mione took another mouthful so that she could tell him, and then sloppily put her glass down on the side table, almost missing it. “It’s... it’s...” Mione’s eyes closed, and her hand fell to her side.

“Mione?” Regulus asked softly. “Are you awake?”

Mione didn’t answer.

Regulus knew that the amount of sleeping potion she’d taken wouldn’t keep her asleep all night, so he placed a sleeping spell on her, before picking her up. “I think it’s time for your bed.”

The next morning Mione woke up feeling groggy. When she looked across the room, Thomas had just finished dressing. “What time is it?”

“Seven o’clock.” Regulus gave a wide smile. “You fell asleep halfway through our conversation.”

“I’m sorry, Thomas.” Mione couldn’t believe how tired she still felt. “Work has been chaotic lately.”

“I totally understand.” Regulus headed for the door. “I have a breakfast meeting so I’ll see you tonight at dinner.” With that he headed out, leaving Mione to shower and get dressed.

Wednesday Night

That night Mione waited in bed again. Regulus came up this time, his wand carefully hidden. As he came out of the bathroom, he discreetly aimed it at Mione, and he quietly whispered. "Somnio."

Mione fell asleep. Regulus then cast a deeper spell, and left the room to sleep in a guest room. Thursday morning, however, wasn't going to go his way.

At breakfast, Mione stared at her husband across the table. "Thomas, have I done something wrong?"

"No, why?" Regulus answered a little nervously.

"Because I get the feeling you're avoiding me." Mione stood up. "You haven't kissed me in days, and you only seem to come to bed once I'm asleep."

Regulus thought quickly. "Things have just been a little hectic this week. It's got absolutely nothing to do with you."

"In that case, there's no reason why you can't spare me a kiss this morning then, is there?" Mione came to a halt in front of Regulus' chair.

Regulus swallowed hard and got up. He pulled Mione into his arms and kissed her cheek. "I'd better be off."

Mione's face was full of hurt. "Have I done something wrong?"

"Don't be silly; of course not." Regulus tried to placate her.

Mione's eyes filled with tears. "Then why won't you kiss me?"

Regulus knew that he couldn't avoid this one, and cupping Mione's face, he gently caressed her lips but didn't deepen the kiss. "I'm

sorry; I didn't mean to upset you. I've just been so busy, I didn't think that I might be hurting you."

Somewhat placated, Mione backed off. "I'll see you tonight at the Island then."

Regulus had to immediately put her off. "I'm going to be in Sweden but I'll see you tomorrow night."

Mione's smile faded for a moment before re-establishing itself. "I'll be waiting."

"I'll see you then." Regulus headed into the hallway and vanished.

Present Time

As Thomas pulled out of his mind, Regulus almost collapsed as Thomas hadn't exactly been gentle.

Thomas scowled at Regulus. "You kissed Mione?"

"I didn't know what else to do." Regulus' voice was shaking as he defended himself. "You saw how upset she was."

Thomas mulled over what he'd seen. Regulus was right; his wife had looked terribly hurt by Regulus' actions. It didn't stop Thomas from feeling angry and jealous however. "I'm going to let it go this time. But if you ever lay a finger on her again, I swear I'll kill you."

Regulus' stomach unclenched as he realized that Thomas wasn't going to punish him. "I'm sorry."

"So she's expecting me tomorrow night?" Thomas steered the subject away from the kiss.

Regulus nodded. "Rivers doesn't think that you'll be on your feet at the earliest though until Saturday morning."

“Send Mione a message that I’ll be there Saturday morning.” Thomas instructed Regulus. “Tell her that I have a meeting on the Strathclyde Project that won’t allow me to leave until Friday night. She has no idea what it is, but she does know that it’s important. Also ask her to make sure that the jet is at Manchester Airport for me.”

Regulus knew that the Strathclyde Project was the name that Thomas had assigned to the research he’d been doing on the Four Pillars and the stone tablet that accompanied them. “I’ll do it tomorrow; make it look as if it’s a last minute thing.”

“Good idea.” Thomas closed his eyes, before asking about one final matter. “How is Cammie?”

“She’s actually made friends with her cousin.” Regulus wished someone else had been the one to tell Thomas, as Thomas’ eyes snapped open again.

“She’s friends with Potter?” Thomas couldn’t believe what had happened in the space of five days.

“He’s been spending every afternoon with her, after visiting Lily.” Regulus filled Thomas in. “Do you want me to stop him?”

Thomas shook his head. “I’ll deal with it.” Thomas again closed his eyes. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Regulus inclined his head, even though Thomas couldn’t see. “I’ll be back in the morning.”

“Oh, and Regulus?” Thomas called out.

Regulus braced himself for the Cruciatus. “Yes?”

“Thank you.” Thomas smiled quietly to himself as the door closed, and Regulus left. He knew what Regulus had been expecting him to do.

Friday Afternoon

Cammie placed her hand of cards down. "I win."

Harry shook his head. "How do you do it? You've beaten me at cards, chess, dice, and the word games!"

Cammie laughed out loud. "You obviously suck at games."

"Obviously." Harry shuffled the cards again. "Best of five?"

"Okay." Cammie smiled widely as she picked up her hand, and teased in a sing-song voice. "You're going to lose."

"I'm so not." Harry, for the first time, had an excellent hand.

Cammie's face fell when, after less than two cards had been played, Harry beat her. "You cheated."

Harry stuck out his tongue. "Do the words 'sore loser' mean anything?"

"You still need to win this hand." Cammie reminded him as she dealt the cards.

Once again, Cammie won, and Harry threw down his cards in frustration. "This isn't fair, Mie, I'm never going to beat you at anything, am I?"

Cammie laughed delightedly. "Only if you get really get lucky."

"Get really lucky with what?" A cold voice interrupted the gaiety.

Both Harry and Cammie shot to their feet as they realized that they were no longer alone; Harry speaking first. "Good afternoon, Sir. I'm glad that you've recovered."

"That didn't answer my question." Thomas knew that Harry couldn't see that he was glaring at him. "Get really lucky at what?"

“Cards.” Cammie spoke up. “I’ve beat Hugh at every game we’ve played so far.”

Thomas wondered for a moment at the use of the names ‘Hugh’ and ‘Mie’ until he remembered his warning to Cammie. “Is that so?” He turned to Harry. “My rooms now. I wish to speak to my ward alone.”

Harry didn’t move. “Mie hasn’t done anything wrong, Sir.”

“I suggest you do as I tell you, boy.” Thomas snapped. “And get out.”

Cammie was frightened of what Dominus would do if her friend didn’t go. “Hugh, please go. I’ll be alright.”

“Are you sure?” Harry knew that he was probably going to pay the price for his insubordination but he couldn’t just leave her alone without checking first.

“Just go.” Cammie urged as she saw Dominus’ hand starting to twitch.

Harry didn’t want Cammie to have to watch him being punished, and so he left.

Thomas turned to his niece. “Who gave you permission to entertain him in your rooms?”

Cammie’s voice shook as she answered. “No-one. He helped me.”

“Explain now.” Thomas stood there as Cammie’s words tumbled out, one after the other, as she nervously and hastily recounted how she’d met Harry. “And has he ever touched you?”

Cammie shook her head. “Of course not. He’s got a girlfriend. We’re just friends, Sir.”

“We will see.” Thomas vanished.

In Thomas' rooms, Harry was nervously pacing up and down. "I am so dead."

"Maybe, maybe not." Thomas' voice interrupted Harry's lament. "But never question an order from me again. Crucio."

Harry's bones felt as if they were on fire as pain ripped through him, and he dropped to the floor screaming.

Thomas didn't hold the spell on Harry for long; he didn't want the boy vomiting on his carpet. "Get up, and take off your mask."

Harry shakily did as he was told, while Thomas tapped his wand against his leg. "How did you meet my ward?"

Harry explained, his account matching Cammie's. "All we've done is play games, Sir."

"Do you know how old she is?" Thomas wanted to make sure that Harry hadn't done more than he was saying.

"Yes, Sir." Harry's face was open and a little horrified at what Thomas was insinuating. "I swear I haven't touched her."

"And you'd better keep it that way if you want to live." Thomas warned, as he debated whether to end the budding friendship. He decided against it, as he hadn't seen Cammie that happy in a long time. "You wish to continue your friendship with my ward?"

Harry wondered what was coming but answered truthfully. "Yes, Sir."

"Then you will put your time with her to good use." Thomas decided. "You are studying advanced history and minoring in potions, are you not?" When Harry confirmed this, Thomas went on. "In that case, you will spend your time with my ward giving her history and potion lessons. What days do you have free?"

Harry quickly responded. "Tuesdays and the weekend."

“You will spend Saturday mornings tutoring Mie. You’ll both be free to do homework in the afternoon; together if you so choose.” Thomas also decided to let Cammie have some free time. “You may spend Sunday with her doing as the two of you please within reason.”

“May we walk the grounds?” Harry knew that Cammie felt restricted indoors.

Thomas knew that the new barrier wards he’d had put in place after Harry’s escape would stop Cammie from leaving, but he was still a little chary of letting Cammie outside. “As long as you stay within sight of the house.”

“Thank you, Sir.” Harry then waited to see whether Dominus wanted anything else from him.

He didn't. “You may go. Do not return to my ward. Your first lesson will be tomorrow, after which you will escort your mother home. Now get out.”

After bowing, Harry put on his mask and slipped out of the room. As he made his way down to the apparition point, he decided to go home to Snape Manor where he could relax, and get something for the shaking and residual pain of the Cruciatus curse.

Thomas returned to Cammie. “‘Hugh’ has gone so you may remove your mask.” Thomas preferred to be able to see Cammie's face when he spoke to her. “I have determined that you were telling the truth, so I’ve told ‘Hugh’ that he will spend Saturday mornings teaching you history and potions.” Cammie’s face told Thomas how she felt about that. “However, he may also visit you on a Sunday when you can both play cards or chess if you so wish. But if he so much as lays a finger on you, I want to hear about it. Am I clear?”

“Yes, Sir.” Cammie hated the idea of the lessons but wanting to see Harry again, she agreed to it.

“And for your lack of judgment in failing to ask for permission, your next meal will be breakfast.” Thomas instituted his usual punishment,

completely unaware that Cammie and Harry had eaten not long before he'd interrupted them.

"Yes, Sir." Cammie dropped her head to hide her smile that she'd finally managed to get one over on Dominus.

Thomas vanished, still tired but aware that he needed to head to the airport within a few hours for his flight.

One week later

Cassandra knocked on Harry's door. When he didn't answer she let herself in, thinking that he was probably sleeping as he had been for most of that week. She was therefore surprised when he stepped out of his bathroom. "Harry, you're up." She put down the glass of wine she had in her hand before dashing across the room to hug him.

"Whoa." Harry stepped backwards as Cassandra cannoned into him. "I'm still not quite myself yet."

"Sorry." Cassandra kept wrapped her arms around Harry. "Bart said it would be at least another week before you were back on your feet. You've been asleep every time I've been home and sat with you, except for when you decided to punish me."

Harry was still feeling exhausted despite defying Bart's prognosis. "I am still tired, but I can at least move under my own steam now. How have you been?" Harry traced the dark circles under his girlfriend's eyes. "It's obvious that you've not been sleeping. I really shouldn't have assigned the night desk duty to you."

"You had nothing to do with my not sleeping." Cassandra's face became tight. "I still get nightmares."

"Sirius told me what happened." Because of his continual need to sleep, Harry still hadn't had a chance to discuss what happened to her with Cassandra. "I'm sorry, Cass."

"It's alright, Harry." Cassandra pulled away from Harry and headed for where she'd left her wine. "Have you managed to remember anything else yet?"

Harry shook his head. "I can remember being in my cell and that woman stabbing me. I also remember Cammie releasing me, and I can also vaguely remember walking in the moonlight outside with her but to be honest, my memory is like sand. The harder I try to recall what happened, the more it seems to slip away from me."

"Damn. H.J. is going to be disappointed." Cassandra's glass refilled itself as she finished the wine in it. "I know he was hoping that it would come back to you with time." Cassandra then changed the subject as it still hurt to talk about Cammie. "So I suppose I'm going to end up back as a paper pusher now that you're recovered."

Harry shook his head. "I'm going to be taking it easy for the next few weeks but Sirius and I talked it over last night, and we've agreed that you're still going to take half of the classes while I take the other half and eventually the Friday lessons."

Cassandra's face lit up. "You still want me to teach?"

"Yes, and I'd also like your help in the Friday classes." Harry informed her. "I still need a guinea pig for the physical sections."

"What about H.J.?" Cassandra had been glad of his help during Harry's absence.

"He's joining Alasdair's accelerated trainees for further training." Harry grinned as H.J. hadn't been told yet. "Sirius is going to tell him on Monday."

Cassandra also grinned as she flopped onto the sofa, and changed the subject. "So have you seen Callista yet?"

"Yes, I have." Harry had had Sirius' new daughter displayed for him the previous night as it had been the first time he'd felt able to cope

with meeting the new addition to the Black family. "She's got quite a pair of lungs on her."

Cassandra giggled. "Dad said that I was worse."

"I'm not surprised." Harry held up his hand as Cassandra glared at him. "I'm only joking." Harry then became serious. "Cass, you really don't look well. How bad has it been for you?"

"I've been miserable without you." Cassandra took another large mouthful of wine. "I've been drinking too much; not sleeping, and working too much. But sometimes I'm too afraid to go to sleep, and the alcohol numbs everything."

At Cassandra's words, Harry took the wine glass out of her hand. "Then that stops now. Believe me alcohol isn't the answer. I know that only too well."

Cassandra knew that Harry had turned to alcohol after Mione's death, but she didn't know exactly how bad it had gotten. "Are you talking about a specific incident?" When Harry confirmed that he was, Cassandra asked. "What did you do?"

"I'd been drinking in a bar when I let six men goad me into a fight. I literally beat the shit out of them. Aurors arrived, and when I ignored them to continue torturing the defenseless individual in front of me, they had to stun me to make me stop." Harry still felt embarrassed when he thought about how stupid he'd been. "I was lucky it was Kingsley and Nym Shacklebolt; they ended up taking me home instead of to a cell. Dad was furious and eventually ended up beating the crap out of me to try and bring me in line."

Cassandra was horrified. "Your Dad did that?"

Harry remembered how badly Remus had hurt him. "Yes. I wouldn't listen to anything he had to say as I was young and full of myself. I was also grieving over Mione but I went too far. Dad did the right thing."

“Did he hurt you badly?” Cassandra knew that Harry’s dad had been a werewolf as well.

“Not as badly as he could have but yes he did. It did the trick though.” Harry sat back down on his bed. “Now I know that that’s an extreme example but believe me there’s always another answer to alcohol.”

“And after what had happened at the Minstrel and its subsequent aftermath, I should know better myself.” Cassandra smiled tightly and got up. “I need to shower, Harry. I’ll be back afterwards.”

Harry woke up when Cassandra came back into his room. “Sorry, I fell asleep again.”

“I thought I was going to do that on the night desk last night.” Cassandra dropped down beside Harry. “It feels nice to be able to cuddle up to you.”

“Cass, if your Dad catches you in here like this, he’ll kill me.” Harry had been warned by Sirius.

“I just want to hold you for a minute.” Cassandra wrapped her arm around Harry’s waist and put her head on his chest. “I’ve missed you.”

Deciding it couldn’t hurt, Harry put his arm around Cassandra’s shoulders. “Five minutes, and then you should get some sleep.”

An hour later, Harry woke up to find Cassandra had burrowed into his side, her hand inside his pajama top. As he moved to release himself, he sucked in his breath as her robe fell open, revealing a mass of silvery scars covering her stomach. Reaching out, Harry gently traced one with his finger.

Cassandra awoke at the touch, and immediately pulled free from Harry, covering her stomach with her robe. “Please don’t; they’re ugly.”

Harry knew that Cassandra would fret if he didn't deal with the problem there and then. "Cass, no part of you is ugly." Harry tugged her robe open, leaving Cassandra exposed. "And they're part of you."

Cassandra covered her stomach with her hands. "But they're never going to fade. They couldn't use magic to heal them as I was in too bad a shape."

"I don't care." Harry moved Cassandra's hands and slid down the bed to kiss the silvery mass of scars. "They're a mark of how brave you were, and I think they make you even more beautiful."

Cassandra couldn't help but cry as Harry moved back up the bed and took her into his arms. "I thought you'd hate them."

"Cass, I don't hate them. Starr put you through a hell you didn't deserve because of me." Harry slid his hand inside Cassandra's robe to stroke her stomach as he spoke. "And I'm sorry."

Cassandra shook her head. "Harry, you can't blame yourself. You heard him. He blamed me as well as Dad."

"I haven't actually seen your memory of what happened yet." Harry admitted. "Sirius has told me in outline about it but I didn't want to view it unless you said so."

"If it helps you to stop feeling guilty, then yes, I'd rather you see it." Cassandra didn't want Harry to feel culpable. "But otherwise, no I'd rather you didn't."

"Then I'd better see it." Harry felt like shit about what Sirius had told him. "Cass, it's killing me to think that it was my fault that you ended up like this."

Cassandra put a hand to his face. "You didn't do make him do it, Harry."

"It still doesn't stop me feeling guilty." Harry kissed Cassandra's fingertips. "If I hadn't punished him, none of this might have

happened. I feel awful that you went through that sort of torture because of something I might have done.”

Cassandra shuddered. “For me the torture wasn’t the worst. It was knowing that he could have taken what I didn’t want to give. When he touched me I wanted to die; I don’t think I’ve ever felt so disgusted in my life. At that moment I wanted you to be there more than I’ve wanted anything before. But you weren’t.”

“If I could have been, I would have. If I could have taken the punishment for you, I would have.” Harry stroked Cassandra’s hair. “I’d die for you Cass, if I had to.”

Cassandra pulled back so that she could look at Harry. Even though she’d thought he would, it was still different to hear it coming from Harry. “You’d really die for me?”

“In a heartbeat.” Harry gently brushed Cassandra’s cheek with his fingers. “You mean more to me than anyone else or anything in my life.” Harry lowered his head and placed small soft kisses all over Cassandra’s face, displaying a tenderness Cassandra had never witnessed before. “I don’t know what I’d have done if I’d lost you.”

“Oh Harry.” Cassandra felt tears spring to her eyes again at Harry’s words. “When I was there, I thought I’d never see you again, and then when I saw you, I wished that you were anywhere but there.”

Harry began to kiss away Cassandra’s tears, his thumb brushing away the ones his mouth missed. “Cass, sweetheart, please don’t cry.”

Cassandra took Harry’s hand before pressing a kiss into his palm, and shakily asked a question. “Harry, will you make love to me?”

Harry hesitated. “Cass, I think it’s too soon.”

“Harry, Craig has said I’m perfectly fine now.” Cassandra tried to reassure Harry.

Harry still wasn't certain it was the right time. "Cass, I'm not sure I'm ready for this, let alone you."

"Harry, is it because of my scars?" Cassandra asked in a fearful voice. "Is it because he touched me?"

"Never, ever think that." Harry rushed to allay Cassandra's fears. "I'm frightened of hurting you."

Cassandra picked Harry's hand up and placed it on her breast. "I need you, Harry."

Harry could see that Cassandra needed the kind of reassurance that came with making love. Even though he was exhausted, he knew that Cassandra's needs had to come first. "I'll be gentle."

After casting a contraceptive spell, Harry then started to place more small kisses over Cassandra's face, moving his hands to cup it. When he finally reached her mouth, he slowly kissed her. He then released her face to help her out of her robe.

In turn, Cassandra helped Harry to undress. Once they were naked, Harry took Cassandra into his arms, at first doing nothing but holding her. He then gradually used his hands to begin a steady but gentle exploration of Cassandra's body, his mouth following his hands' path. When Harry reached Cassandra's stomach, he felt her tense up. "Cass, I meant what I said. Every part of you is beautiful including these."

His mouth then traced each and every silvery scar that now adorned Cassandra's stomach. Harry eventually returned his attention to Cassandra's mouth kissing her until she too went to copy what Harry had done, and started to kiss Harry's neck, intending to follow the same pathways Harry had taken on her body. However, Harry shook his head. "This time is for you."

Again and again Harry kissed and caressed Cassandra's body until it was slick with light perspiration, and Cassandra felt that she couldn't wait any longer. "Harry, please."

Covering Cassandra's body with his own, Harry began to make love to her, ignoring his own needs, and taking it slowly; all the time pressing small kisses to Cassandra's face. When she eventually came apart beneath him, Harry withdrew. Cassandra had never felt as cherished as she did now as she held onto Harry until her breathing became even again. "Harry, you didn't..."

"I said this was for you." Harry kissed her. "I can wait."

Cassandra touched Harry face. "I love you."

"And you mean the world to me." Harry then pulled the covers over them, intending to get some sleep.

And it was wrapped in each other's arms that Sirius found his daughter and her boyfriend when he opened Harry's bedroom door. "Cassandra Black, get up now."

Cassandra pulled her robe on and got out of the bed. "Dad, you..."

"Your room now." Sirius snapped, before he turned to Harry. "I'll be back shortly."

Harry closed his eyes. "Just fucking great."

Sirius marched Cassandra to her bedroom. "What did I tell you about behaving like that under my roof?"

"Dad, it wasn't like that." Cassandra started to protest. "Harry was just..."

"I have eyes, Cassandra." Sirius was furious. "I can see exactly what Harry was just about to do. You're banned from his room while he's a guest here." With that Sirius stormed out and returned to Harry's room. "While you're staying here, I expect you conduct yourself properly."

Harry also tried reasoning with Sirius. "It's not what it looked like."

“It looked like you were about to sleep with my daughter under my roof.” Sirius snarled.

Harry decided that reasoning with Sirius was going to get him nowhere. “Sirius, I wasn’t about to sleep with your daughter; I’d just slept with her.”

Sirius’ anger escalated at Harry’s declaration. “I thought I’d made it perfectly clear...”

“You did.” Harry interrupted. “But Cass needed it.”

“More likely you did.” Sirius snapped, his face ugly.

Harry sat up, the sheet pooling around his waist, his own face turning ugly. “Do you have any idea what your daughter is going through?” Harry growled, his eyes flashing amber; something he didn’t realize but Sirius noticed. “She’s not sleeping, she’s drinking too much, and she’s entirely insecure about her scars.”

Sirius had seen the silvery scars that covered Cassandra’s stomach. “The scars don’t matter. It’s more important that she’s alive.”

“She doesn’t see it like that.” Harry could see that Sirius wasn’t getting it. “She was terrified that I’d hate her because of them; that I wouldn’t want her because Starr had touched her.”

Sirius was horrified. “Why would she think that?”

“Because I’ve been unable to tell her any differently until now.” Harry could see he was finally getting through. “If it had been you, and Faith had told you how she felt, and asked you to make love to her, what would you have done?”

Sirius knew the answer, even if he didn’t like it. “I’d have done everything I could to make her feel better about herself.”

“Which is what I did for Cass. I think you owe your daughter an apology, Sirius.” Harry lay back down, exhaustion starting to overcome him. “And you needn’t worry about catching us together again. I’m returning home tomorrow.”

“Harry, I’m sorry.” Sirius apologized, aware that he’d been wrong to jump to the conclusion he had. “I should have known that you wouldn’t have deliberately flouted my rules without good reason. Please stay.”

“I accept your apology, and thank you, I’ll stay.” Despite his assertion that he was going to return home, Harry knew that he’d find it difficult coping; the house elves in the Black household made his life far easier than it would be in either his or Cassandra’s apartments.

“I’d best go and see Cassie.” Sirius walked out and closed the door.

Harry let out a long sigh and closed his eyes. Moments later he was asleep.

Sirius knocked on Cassandra’s door, going in when she called out. He could see that she’d been crying. “I’m sorry, Cassie.”

Cassandra was completely taken aback. “Dad, it really...”

Sirius stopped her. “Harry told me. Why didn’t you come and talk to me about your fears about your scars, Cassie? I would have listened.”

“You couldn’t know how Harry would react.” Cassandra correctly pointed out. “My scars make me feel ugly. I was frightened Harry would think the same.”

“He doesn’t though, does he?” Sirius sat down on the bed next to his daughter.

Cassandra shook her head. “He said that they’re beautiful, like me.” She started to cry again. “I’ve been so scared that he’d reject me when he saw them, Dad.”

Sirius pulled her into his arms, tears filling his own eyes. "Cassie, I'm so sorry."

Cassandra cried quietly as her Dad rubbed her back. Sirius pulled her to her feet as she finished crying. "Go back to Harry."

"But..." Cassandra was astonished.

"This is obviously something I can't help with, and he can." Sirius finally faced up to the truth that his daughter wasn't a little girl anymore, and he couldn't simply kiss her hurts away, and make things better. "Go on."

Cassandra kissed Sirius on the cheek. "Thanks, Dad."

Sirius sat down as Cassandra vanished. Giving way to his own feelings, he struggled to hold back more tears as he realized that he'd let his daughter down. He hadn't noticed that she'd been burdened by any sort of worries, and now he was wracked with guilt over it. Needing his wife's comfort, he too vanished.

Harry opened his eyes as he felt someone climb into bed with him. "Cass, what are you doing?"

"Dad sent me here." Cassandra curled up to Harry's back. "Night Harry."

"It's actually morning." Harry, however, yawned, turned around and pulled Cassandra to him before closing his eyes and slipping into sleep again. Exhausted from work, worry, and stress, Cassandra too was asleep in moments.

Next Chapter: Remus has news; Thomas gets closer to his goal; Harry Potter has a tough choice to make.

Chapter 48: What is Right or What is Easy?

April 7th 2005

Mione hissed quietly. "Remus?"

"Huh?" Remus looked around and realized that everyone was waiting for him to continue. "Sorry. In relation to..."

At the end of the meeting Mione followed Remus back to his office, and closed the door behind them. She placed her papers on what used to be her desk, and turned to face him. "What's wrong?"

Remus sighed. "It was that obvious?"

"I've never had to prompt you in a meeting until now. Today I had to do it three times." Mione gently chided Remus.

Remus was aware that he was going to have to tell people eventually, so he decided to start with Mione. "Buffy's pregnant."

Mione smiled. "Remus, that's wonderful." When he didn't respond in kind, her smile fell away. "It's not wonderful?"

Remus shook his head. "It isn't something either of us wanted."

Mione moved to sit on the edge of Remus' desk so that she was facing him, rather than having the impersonal space of the desk between them. "I'm sorry. How did it happen?"

"I stupidly let Buffy take care of birth control. She didn't like the idea of using magic." Remus' face said everything about how he felt about his own idiocy. "Unfortunately when she came down with a cold, and the medicine she used apparently diminished the efficacy of the tablets she was taking."

"When did you find out?" Mione reached out to hold the hand that Remus had rested on the table.

“Last night.” Remus grimaced as he thought about the stilted conversation he and Buffy initially had had. “She’d gone for a routine check-up, and the doctor surprised her with the news that she’s pregnant. When I found out, I took her to St. Mungo’s to double-check the Muggle doctor’s finding. The healer we saw confirmed the news, told us that the baby was alright, and also dropped the bombshell that Buffy’s four months along.”

“Four months?” Mione’s tone was incredulous. “Didn’t she spot that something was up?”

“The Muggle contraceptive she uses almost eliminates a monthly period, and she’s hardly put on any weight.” Remus defended his girlfriend. “Neither of us had any reason to suspect that she might be pregnant.”

Mione then asked the next logical question. “Didn’t her scent change?”

“A little.” Remus admitted. “But I just put it down to the Muggle contraceptive.”

Mione was also aware that things at work had been beyond hectic with an increase in vampire and demon sightings worldwide, meaning that both she and Remus had been distracted lately. “Okay. So when are you getting married?”

Remus made a face. “We’re not. I asked but she turned me down. She said that unlike Faith, she couldn’t tie herself into a marriage she couldn’t get out of, particularly as we haven’t been getting along that well lately.”

Mione squeezed Remus’ hand in a consolatory gesture. “So what are you going to do?”

Remus told her of what he and Buffy had decided upon. “We’re obviously going to go through with the pregnancy. Once the baby’s born, she’ll bear my last name. And if we’re still together when she

arrives, then Buffy will move in with me. If not, then we're going to set up some sort of shared custody of our daughter."

Mione was a little alarmed at the lack of animation Remus was showing. "Aren't you even a little excited?"

Remus realized that Mione had misconstrued his matter-of-fact way of dealing with the situation for a lack of enthusiasm. "Of course I am. But I thought that when I had a child I'd be married and in love with my wife."

"You're not in love with Buffy?" Mione couldn't help asking despite Remus' comment about the degradation of his relationship.

"I never have been. And Buffy's not in love with me either. Our relationship sprang up from a mutual inability to be with the people we're truly in love with." Remus informed her. "But don't get the wrong idea. We do love each other but it's not the heart-stopping passion that comes with being in love."

Mione was a little dismayed by Remus' declaration. "I'm not sure I could be in a relationship like that."

"I take it this means that you're still in love with Thomas?" Remus made his voice teasing and light; not wanting to reveal how much Mione's answer would hurt him.

Mione's face softened. "Very much so. We've had a few ups and downs but I couldn't imagine life without him."

"So this must mean you got over the other week's hiccup." Remus had been Mione's sounding board when she'd lamented that Thomas had been ignoring her, and he'd listened to her worries that Thomas didn't love her anymore.

Mione nodded. "When he got to the Island, Thomas said that he was sorry he'd neglected me, but that it had been a bad week for him."

Remus smiled. "So between Harry and I, we were actually right?"

Mione grinned. "Surprisingly, yes."

Mione had also turned to Harry when she'd visited him to check on how he was doing, and he'd ended up comforting her, saying that marriages weren't always perfect even if you were in love with your partner. Mione had no way of knowing that her discussion with Harry had caused him to yet again dismiss his niggling concerns about Thomas. As Harry had listened to Mione, he'd remembered what Voldemort was supposed to have done to Selena Gregory for her unfaithfulness, and he'd decided that there would have been no way that, if he was Voldemort, Thomas would have allowed someone to share Mione's bed to cover up his injuries, even if it had been on a platonic basis.

When Harry had mentioned this to Sirius, his superior had immediately agreed with him. Harry, however, had had a sneaking suspicion that Sirius simply preferred to go along with Harry's conclusion not necessarily because it was right, but because Sirius couldn't contemplate the idea that Regulus might have lied to him. Unfortunately for Harry and Sirius, they had no idea that Thomas had had no say in the matter.

When Mione had gotten back, she'd told Remus what Harry had said. Remus had then told Mione to stop worrying and that things would return to normal. Now, knowing that he'd been right, Remus asked about Mione's sex life in as delicate a manner as he could. "So did you two...?"

Mione remembered her complaints about Thomas' bedtime habits that week. "Not at the weekend we didn't but, as you predicted, things were back to normal by the middle of the week, so I decided that, as you said, Thomas had just let work get on top of him."

"It happens to the best of us." Remus knew only too well how that could happen. "I'm just glad that you're happy again."

Mione met Remus' bleak gaze. "I am. I just wish you were."

“I knew what I was getting into when I started sleeping with Buffy.” Remus smiled wryly. “Buffy made it perfectly clear that her heart belonged to someone else, as did I.”

“If things don’t work out between the two of you, is there any chance of either of you getting to be with the people you really want to be with?” Mione hated that Remus and Buffy might be hurting, especially as she was so content in her own relationship.

Remus’ face said it all as he responded to the question. “For me, I have to say no. The woman I’m in love with is in a very happy pureblood marriage and deeply in love with her husband, and I can’t ever see that changing. Even if did, I doubt she’d be interested in me.”

Mione wanted to cry at the despondent look on Remus’ face, and she got up, tugging him up as well so that she could hug him. “I’m so sorry, Remus. I wish there was something I could do.”

Remus buried his face in Mione’s hair, relishing the feel of her against him. But even as he did so, he knew that it was just a stolen moment, and that despite his feelings for her, while he was still with Buffy he’d never do anything to betray his girlfriend, just as he knew that Mione would never betray Thomas’ love for her. “There’s nothing either of us can do about this one. C’est la vie.”

Mione gave him one last hug and let go. “What about Buffy?”

“Her dilemma isn’t any better than mine; in fact it’s worse.” Remus didn’t mind telling Mione as he knew she would keep it to herself, not even discussing it with Thomas. “When we first got together I thought she was still in love with her previous boyfriend, as did she. It turned out that she’s actually still in love with Spike.”

“Spike?” Mione’s face reflected her surprise. “As in the vampire Spike?”

“The one and the same.” Remus confirmed. “I was as stunned as you when I found out. If she’d remained in love with anyone, I thought it would have been Angel but Buffy said that Spike, out of everyone she knew, understood her and her neuroses.”

“So why can’t she be with him?” Working for the Council, Mione was au fait with Spike and Angel. “He has a soul now, so he’s not dangerous.”

“Like us, she doesn’t know where he is; she’s not sure if he’s even still alive. But mostly she can’t face the idea that if he is still alive, he’ll stay young and virile, while she’ll grow old and eventually die.” Remus explained. “The only real way that they could stay together would be if Buffy was bitten but she’d be soulless and it’s not exactly what she wants.”

“What about how Spike got his soul back?” Mione asked. “Couldn’t Buffy do the same?”

Remus didn’t think so. “Buffy could try but she’d have to truly desire a soul; something all vampires usually find disgusting. Spike was an anomaly; the government chip made him different. So, in answer to your question, I’d have to say no.”

Mione let out a long sigh. “So you’re both doomed to pine after someone you can’t have.”

Remus couldn’t help but laugh. “Mione, you sound like a terrible romance novel.”

Mione blushed. “Sorry. It’s just that I think it’s sad that the two of you can’t be with who you want to be, and even though you’ve managed to find each other, you might not be able to make it work.”

“Only time will tell. Even though she’s refused to marry me, Buffy and I are going to do the right thing.” Remus and Buffy had sat late into the night talking about it. “While we know that what’s happened isn’t exactly ideal, we are going to try and make the best of things for our daughter’s sake.”

Mione moved back around the desk. "You shouldn't have to make the best of things, Remus."

"Not everyone is as lucky as you are." Remus smiled tightly.

"No they're not." Mione picked up her papers. "I have a wonderful husband, two beautiful children and a job I love. For me, life just doesn't get any better than this."

Remus was aware that Mione wasn't trying to rub his nose in his own situation, and that she was merely stating a fact. "I don't suppose it does."

As she opened the door to leave, Mione smiled sympathetically in response to Remus' statement before closing it behind her. Unfortunately for her, Mione had no idea how disastrously wrong her words would be when, some years later, she'd be left wondering how she hadn't realized that her idyllic life had been little more than a sham.

April 22nd 2005

Harry lay in bed watching as the dawn started to break and lighten the bedroom. Next to him, Cassandra lay sleeping, the sheet pooled around her hips. As the first fingers of light crept over the bed, Harry couldn't help but let his eyes stray to Cassandra's stomach. While he'd told her the truth that he didn't care about her scars, and that she was beautiful even with them, he was still wracked by a terrible guilt that it had been his fault. Getting up, he headed into the bathroom. When he came out, he found that Cassandra was awake and had pulled the sheet up over her. "Morning. I didn't mean to wake you."

In the dim morning light, Cassandra could see lines of fatigue on Harry's face and, knowing what had put them there, immediately went onto the offensive. "This is getting ridiculous. I can't remember the last time you slept through the night." She sat up. "Harry, you can't

keep blaming yourself for what happened. You're going to make yourself ill."

"I'll be fine." Harry's tone was terse, and he turned to head out into the main living area.

Cassandra's sharp tone stopped him in his tracks. "No, you won't, Harry. So please do us both a favor, and watch the damned memory."

"Maybe later." Harry closed the door behind him, leaving a frustrated Cassandra behind.

One week later

Harry was exhausted. The nightmares that had been plaguing him since his discovery of Cassandra's scars were now a twice nightly occurrence. His throat sore from screaming, he sat up, sweat beading his forehead.

Harry's screams had awoken Cassandra, and she reached out, taking his hand. "Harry, just take deep breaths. Was it the usual nightmare? Your screams were so much worse."

Harry's usual nightmare was Cassandra crying out, begging him for help as Starr attacked her. Now his nightmare had morphed into something very different. "No. This time it was different. It wasn't Starr hurting you; it was me, and I changed just before I ripped open your stomach."

Cassandra sighed. "Harry, you're torturing yourself unnecessarily. Please just watch the memory."

Harry again refused. "I can't Cass. I thought I could but I can't. I'm sorry." He got out of bed. "Perhaps I'd best sleep in the spare room."

"Harry, I don't want you to sleep in the spare room. I want you to sleep with me." Cassandra protested softly.

“Not tonight.” With that, Harry walked out.

Cassandra collapsed against the pillows. Her own nightmares had diminished after she'd spoken to a counselor at BritAD. Emily Blunt had helped Cassandra to realize that none of what had happened had been in any way her fault; that what Starr had done had been of his own choosing, and that if it hadn't been Cassandra he'd attacked, then it would probably have been someone else. Emily had also talked to Cassandra about Harry. Cassandra had come to believe that Harry didn't want to view the memory as he couldn't face the idea that he might not be at fault, and that Harry preferred to live with the guilt. She just hoped that Harry would eventually relent and watch the memory, as it was beginning to put a terrible strain on his health as well as their relationship.

Rolling over, Cassandra hugged Harry's pillow to her, before eventually falling asleep.

May 18th 2009

Harry's screams were the worst Cassandra had ever heard. She quickly shook him. “Harry, wake up.”

Still caught in the remnants of his nightmare, Harry reacted in the worst possible way to Cassandra's rough treatment, and grabbed her by the throat. By the time he'd come to, Cassandra had passed out. Harry didn't hesitate and pulling her into his arms, he portkeyed them both to St. Mungo's.

Sirius, who'd been alerted of Cassandra's admission, found a grey faced Harry sitting at Cassandra's bedside. “Harry, what happened?”

A very upset Harry told him, his voice breaking midpoint. “She startled me in the middle of a nightmare and I attacked her. I nearly killed her, Sirius. Craig said that I've damaged her windpipe. If...if...if I'd squeezed any harder, I'd have broken her neck.”

Even though he knew it hadn't been intentional, Sirius was extremely alarmed by Harry's actions. "Harry, I want you to move out of Cassandra's apartment."

"I'm going to." Harry dropped his head into his hands; when he looked up, he had tears in his eyes. "I don't know what to do, Sirius. I don't want to view the memory; to witness what she had to go through but I think I'm going to go insane if I don't."

"Then do the right thing, Harry, and watch the memory." Sirius said gently, as he placed a hand on Harry's shoulder.

Harry glanced over at his sedated girlfriend, and nodded. "I'll move out today and watch it at the weekend."

Sunday morning

Harry emerged from the pensieve, his back to Cassandra. "Cass, leave now."

"Harry?" Cassandra asked in a tentative voice as she placed a hand on Harry's back.

"I said go." Harry snarled.

"Harry, it wasn't your fault. It was..." Cassandra's words died away as Harry spun round, his face totally bereft of any color. "Harry, what's wrong?"

Harry doubled up in pain and collapsed to the floor. "Please go, Cass." Harry pleaded with his girlfriend, his pain coming through in his voice.

"I'm not leaving you." Cassandra argued. "We need to get you to a hospital."

Harry's head snapped up, and he resorted to vulgarity in the hope that he'd shock Cassandra into leaving. "Just fuck off, you stupid bitch."

But it wasn't Harry's words that made Cassandra gasp and take a step backwards. It was the feral look on Harry's face, and the fact that his eyes had turned a vivid amber; an amber that was distinctly not human. "Oh Merlin."

Harry couldn't get his breath to say anything else as he writhed in agony on the floor.

Cassandra was torn as to what to do but when Harry let out a growl unlike anything she'd heard before except when she'd viewed him as a werewolf, Cassandra was filled with a horrible feeling that Harry was changing. Knowing she'd be in danger if she stayed, she reluctantly left.

When Harry came to, he found himself on the floor of Cassandra's apartment in pain, naked and bleeding, glass lying all around him. "Medicus Instanter."

For a split second, the nurse on the desk couldn't help but stare at the naked man who'd appeared in front of her, before summoning a blanket and rushing over to Harry. "What happened to you?"

"I don't know." Harry let the nurse cover him with a blanket before closing his eyes again as his world began to spin.

Cassandra was sitting at his bedside when he awoke, stroking Harry's hair back off his face. "Hi, Harry. I was starting to worry that you wouldn't wake up."

"How did I get here?" Harry asked, a little confused..

"You activated your ring." Cassandra told him. "Don't you remember?"

"The last thing I remember was watching Starr touch your breast and telling you what he was going to do to you." Harry rubbed his head. "What happened?"

“You came out of the pensieve, and told me to get out.” Cassandra informed Harry. “When I didn’t, you were quite rude. I changed my mind about leaving though, when you gave a growl I’ve only heard once before. After that I don’t know what else happened. But to be honest, I think you must have transformed.”

Harry's brow furrowed as he tried to remember what had happened but was unable to do so. “I didn’t think it was possible to transform without a full moon or a spell.”

“It’s a full moon tomorrow.” Cassandra reminded him. “You always say that the wolf gets closer to the surface as it approaches.”

Harry nodded. “You’re right. It does.”

The two fell quiet until Cassandra asked Harry about his experience inside the pensieve. “How did you feel when you were watching the memory?”

“Angrier than I’ve ever felt in my entire life.” Harry remembered how anger had washed over him like a flood. “And frustrated that I could do nothing. I do know that if Starr had been in front of me, I’d probably have killed him with my bare hands. But I’ve still got no idea why I might have changed.”

“I think with the full moon tomorrow, and being so angry, you let the wolf take over you.” Cassandra surmised. “Given that, I suggest that you don’t view the memory again.”

“I don’t need to.” Harry’s voice was full of disgust. “I think that Starr is a sick individual who, for whatever reason, hates women. For anyone to do that to a defenseless woman you’d have to be. But I do believe that he viewed me as someone who stopped him from getting what he wanted and that’s why he used me against you.”

Cassandra let out a sigh of relief as she realized that Harry might finally be ready to admit that it wasn’t his fault. “Emily said the same thing after she viewed the memory.” She smiled brightly at Harry. “Perhaps we both might get some sleep tonight.”

Harry knew his response was going to irritate his girlfriend. "Cass, I think I should spend tonight at home."

Cassandra didn't want that. "I don't think you'll hurt me now, and I'll use a spell to wake you if you have nightmares again."

"Cass, it's not up for debate." Harry said softly. "As you so correctly pointed out, it's a full moon tomorrow so I'm not willing to take the chance I might attack you."

Aware that Harry wouldn't change his mind, Cassandra had to give in. "I'm going home to clean up. Craig is going to check on you later, and to release you. So I'll see you later." Getting up, she kissed Harry on the cheek and left him alone.

Harry lay back. He'd felt Cassandra's annoyance and frustration at his declaration but there was no way he was changing his mind about the sleeping arrangements, at least for that night.

Five nights' later

Cassandra lay in bed, tossing and turning. Getting up, she pulled on her dressing gown and headed for the spare room. While she'd finally managed to talk Harry into moving back in by using the oldest feminine wile in the book, tears, she'd been unable to sway him into moving back into her room.

Roused from an extremely deep sleep, Harry became aware that a very naked Cassandra was in his bed, and that her hands were running over his chest, her mouth kissing along his jaw line. Harry grabbed Cassandra's hands. "Cass, what are you doing in here?"

"Harry, it's been over a month since we last made love." Cassandra protested, as she tried to tug her hands free.

Harry was more than aware of how long it had been. "Cass, I know that but I don't think this is a good idea. What if I hurt you?"

“Harry, you've only had one nightmare since you viewed the memory, and you're awake, so you won't hurt me.” As Cassandra finished her sentence, she used her teeth to bite gently on Harry's ear. “Don't you want me?”

Harry retained his grip on Cassandra's hands. “Cass, you know I do. But I'd rather wait a little longer until I'm sure.”

“I don't want to wait any longer.” Cassandra didn't know why, but she almost felt as if she'd die if they didn't make love, and she tried to tug her hands free again.

Harry didn't want to hurt her, so he let go of her hands. “Cass, I do.”

“Please, Harry.” Cassandra slid her hand beneath the sheet, making Harry groan. “I need you.”

Under Cassandra's insistent ministrations, Harry's body was now starting to betray him, and against his better judgment, he knew he was going to give in to her, and he therefore used his wand to cast the necessary contraceptive spell. “If anything happens, then I want you to leave.”

Cassandra didn't respond as she cupped Harry's face with her free hand and covered his lips, stopping any conversation. Harry opened up to her probing tongue, and began to use his own hands to gently explore Cassandra's body. Harry then pulled his mouth away and began to nuzzle Cassandra's throat, making her moan loudly. Kissing his way down to her breast, Harry took her nipple into his mouth, softly biting on it until it became hard against his tongue. Wanting to feel Harry's mouth against her own again, Cassandra grabbed Harry's hair, pulling his head up from her breast.

As he opened his mouth for Cassandra's almost frantic kiss, Harry was anything but tender as he returned it, not stopping until Cassandra was breathless. Harry then growled low in his throat as his hand cupped her breast, his finger and thumb teasing the nipple into hardness before bringing his mouth down to join them. As Harry stopped what he was doing to slide back up Cassandra's body, she made her dismay known as she whimpered in complaint. But as

Harry's chest hair brushed roughly against her nipples, Cassandra arched up against him, gasping into his mouth as he began to kiss her again. As their kisses became even more heated, they rolled over and over on the bed before plummeting to the floor; Harry taking the brunt of the drop. Harry, however, ignored the fact that he'd just plummeted several feet onto his back, and lifted Cassandra into the air. Then, without warning, Harry slid into Cassandra in one fluid motion as he pulled her down against him. As Cassandra stiffened at the unexpected intrusion, Harry rolled them over so that Cassandra was once more pinned beneath him.

Glancing up, Cassandra felt a frisson of fear and excitement as she met Harry's eyes, to find his had reverted to the amber ones of the wolf. As Harry once more claimed her mouth, Cassandra found that despite Harry's warning about his changing, she didn't care, and she simply gave in to her feelings. However, unlike all the other times they'd made love, this time Cassandra felt as if Harry was trying to possess her as he started to make love to her, and she responded in kind. Driven on by an almost desperate need she'd never known before, she wrapped her legs around his back. Short moments later Cassandra tried to pull him deeper into her, crying out and shaking as she did so, before sinking her nails into Harry's back and her teeth into his shoulder, drawing blood, not caring that she was hurting him.

Harry responded to Cassandra's violence by almost brutally slamming into her as Cassandra rose up to meet him, matching him thrust for thrust. But even in his almost feral state, Harry was still aware that he could easily hurt her, and he tempered the intensity accordingly. Cassandra, however, had no such concerns, and with Harry's blood still on her lips, she roughly grabbed his hair, and pulled his mouth to hers, their teeth clashing together as she feverishly kissed him, her second release of the night hitting her.

As his own release grew ever closer, Harry became lost in the sensations their violent lovemaking was invoking, and giving into the wolf, he let it rise to the surface as his body tightened and heat pooled in the pit of his stomach. Without realizing what he was doing, Harry tore his mouth from Cassandra's and, growling, bit deeply into her throat as waves of pleasure rippled over him.

The effect on Cassandra was instantaneously sobering, and she began to fight to get free, but Harry held her immobile beneath him, his fingers digging into the top of her arms as he lapped at the blood he'd drawn. Cassandra couldn't help the tears that began to fall down her cheeks at the pain Harry had just inflicted on her, and it was the sound of Cassandra's quiet sobs that finally penetrated Harry's consciousness. As Harry realized what he'd done, he quickly released Cassandra, before pulling her to her feet.

Rather than turning away from him as Harry expected, Cassandra instead wrapped her arms around him and sobbed into his chest. Harry was beyond mortified at what he'd done. "I'm sorry, Cass. I'm so sorry."

Cassandra couldn't answer and continued to sob as Harry held her. Sweeping her into his arms, Harry carried her out of the bedroom, into her own room and then into the bathroom, where he began to run a bath. Sitting down on the ottoman, Harry rocked Cassandra as she wept. "Sweetheart, I'm sorry."

After a few minutes, Cassandra began to calm down, and sucking in hiccupping breaths, she lifted her head to look at Harry, who was visibly shaking, and had tears in his eyes. "It's okay, Harry."

"No, Cass. It's not." Harry wiped Cassandra's tears away with his fingers. "I was far too rough with you."

"Harry, I wasn't much better." Cassandra said in a gentle voice, forgetting about her own distress to help Harry deal with his. She touched his shoulder, which was still bloody and bore her teeth marks. "I don't know what came over me; I've never been that forceful before. This must have hurt you."

"It really didn't." Harry assured her; he'd barely registered the pain. "Cass, I feel terrible. I behaved like an animal."

"And you weren't alone." Cassandra couldn't deny that she too had been bordering on feral in her actions. "I don't know how to explain it but even before I bit you, I felt different."

“So did I.” Harry told her. “For me it was almost as though I let the wolf consume me but without the change.”

“Your eyes changed.” Cassandra admitted. “They became amber and didn't really look human anymore.”

Harry scowled at his girlfriend. “I told you to leave if I began to change.”

“I couldn't.” Cassandra defended her motives to stay. “I was pinned under you at the time, so you'd have apparated out with me, and I found that even though I felt a little scared, I'd never wanted you more.”

“And I felt the same way.” Harry sighed as he lifted Cassandra into the bathtub with him. “But I bit you, Cass; I hurt you when I said I wouldn't.”

Cassandra put a finger on Harry's lips to stop his protests. “Harry, yes, you bit me. But it's no big deal. I admit it hurt but probably no more than the bite I gave you, and besides, it will fade.”

“It won't fade, Cass.” Harry tugged Cassandra so that she had to turn around.

“What do you mean?” Cassandra nestled herself against Harry's chest.

“I'm not sure if you know this, but werewolves use a bite to mark the man or woman they consider to be their life mate.” Harry moved his arms to encircle Cassandra's waist. “And it also acts as a warning to other werewolves that that person is considered to be the property of the werewolf who bit them.”

Cassandra knew a lot about werewolves but due to the laws that existed, little could be found in a book about their mating rituals. “You consider me your property?”

Harry began to play with a lock of Cassandra's hair as he explained what he meant. "No, but the wolf in me does."

"So it thinks I belong to it?" Cassandra reached up and touched her neck as she asked, wincing as it was already beginning to bruise.

"Yes." Harry confirmed her statement before focusing on something Cassandra had said. "You said you felt different tonight, didn't you?"

Cassandra nodded. "I did. I don't know why but I had an overwhelming need to be with you."

"I think you were reacting to the wolf." Harry told her. "I've spoken to Remus about this, and he said, that unlike in my own world, once the wolf has decided on its life partner, it will cause it's host to emit a sexual pheromone if it believes that person will be receptive to it. I think that after what happened in the pensieve, it decided that you needed protecting, hence my unconsciously emitting a scent to attract you."

"So you're saying that I acted like I did because of your scent?" Cassandra's voice relayed her skepticism.

"I was as cynical as you when Remus told me, especially as I'm not from this world." Harry responded. "But I can't think of another explanation as to why you acted in the way you did. You've bitten me before but never this badly. Also you've never been that sexually aggressive before, and, despite my warning, you didn't attempt to escape when you noticed that my eyes had changed."

Cassandra mulled over what Harry had said for a few moments before responding. "So basically I reacted so violently because of your scent, and this bite won't fade because the wolf likes me?"

Harry knew that he needed to finish telling Cassandra what else the bite signified. "Yes, but there's more to the bite than the fact that it won't fade and the wolf likes you."

As the possible ramifications of the bite entered Cassandra's mind, she paled as she thought about the bite mark Harry had on his arm that had never faded. "You don't mean I'm going to become a werewolf as well, do you?"

Harry shook his head. "No, it's not that kind of bite." Harry swallowed hard. "Cass, to make such a bite, not only must the lupine half of a werewolf consider the person it bites to be its life mate but the human half must as well."

As the implication of what Harry was saying started to sink in, Cassandra's voice came out in little more than a whisper. "You consider me your life mate?"

"I do." At his declaration, Harry closed his eyes and buried his nose in Cassandra's hair, and finally said the words he'd never thought he would be able to. "Cass, I love you."

Cassandra couldn't help it, and started to cry again at Harry's announcement. Harry tightened his grip around her waist. "I'm sorry, Cass. I should have told you sooner but stupid bastard that I am, I refused to see what should have been clear as daylight."

Cassandra gave a wet giggle at Harry's description of himself. "You're not stupid, Harry, but I'd agree that you've been blind."

"Not anymore." Harry turned Cassandra around to face him. "I love you."

Cassandra smiled happily through her tears. "And I love you." She then leant forward and kissed Harry. As they had earlier, their kisses led to lovemaking, only this time it was filled with the tenderness that had been missing previously.

Afterwards, Harry yawned as he cradled Cassandra. "I think it's time we got some sleep."

“I think the bed might be preferable.” Cassandra shivered slightly as the water had now begun to cool. She gasped as Harry stood up, easily lifting her up as well. “Harry, I can walk.”

“And I want to carry you.” Harry climbed out of the bathtub, and cast a drying spell over them both before he carried Cassandra back into her bedroom where, sated and happy, the pair curled up to each other before falling asleep.

August 21st 2005

Thomas looked over Rupert’s notes for the second time. “This really is excellent detective work, Rupert.”

“It’s taken some time but as I’ve indicated, I’ve finally managed to narrow things down to a couple of dates and an area.” Rupert responded. “Unfortunately, it took so long as my only clue was that prophecy.”

Not having heard it before, Lily asked about it. “What does it say?”

Thomas recited the prophecy that Rupert had found.

“To discover the tablet to bind the four

Journey to a distant shore

Where on the third quarter day it can be seen

In the clearing ringed by brown and green

On land possessed by the crafter of clay

Concealed inside the pillar of granite grey

But only the holder of the heart of red

Can remove it from its watery bed.”

Lily snorted as she mentioned a long-dead squib. "It's hardly Wordsworth, is it?"

Rupert rolled his eyes. "As long as we can find the tablet, that's all that matters."

"So what does the prophecy mean?" Regulus asked. "A distant shore is a little imprecise."

"I agree." Lucius turned to Rupert. "How could you know for sure where the tablet is, from such an obtuse prophecy?"

Rupert began to explain. "I first of all deciphered the parts that were obvious."

Lily jumped in. "The heart of red refers to the Validus Saxus, doesn't it?"

Rupert nodded. "It does. It's also known as the Red Heart of Rangoon, hence the referral."

Regulus sat forward. "So the tablet is in Myanmar?"

Rupert smiled. "No, that's just where the ruby was from. I deduced that the tablet is located in Scotland or England."

"That hardly narrows things down." Lucius exclaimed. "And how did you come to that conclusion?"

"Because quarter days were only used by those countries. Ireland did use them but stopped the practice some time ago." Rupert said triumphantly. "But unfortunately I now have a choice of two quarter days to choose from. While both dates relate to the third quarter day, in England it's known as Michaelmas and is on 29th September but in Scotland it's known as Lammass and is on 1st August. England changed their dates during the 18th century."

Lily was impressed. "So which date do you think most likely?"

“September.” Rupert answered her question. “But it could still be August which means that we’ve missed the deadline for this year if it is.”

“So we’d better hope that September is correct.” Thomas responded wryly.

Rupert was almost sure it was. “As to where the tablet is, I believe it’s in a river bed or river and…”

“…obviously concealed inside a granite pillar or rock.” Regulus finished off Rupert’s sentence. “What about the crafter of clay?”

“That would be a potter.” Rupert responded.

Lily gasped as she comprehended what Rupert was saying. “You mean to say that of all the places in the world the tablet could be, it’s on Potter land?”

Rupert thought so. “The tablet has obviously been concealed by magic, and because Jackson was a Muggle, I believe that one of Potter’s ancestors must have aided him, which is why the tablet ended up on Potter property.”

Regulus then made a good point. “You said England or Scotland. Isn’t Potter’s property based in Wales?”

Lily answered that question for him. “Most of it is, but some spills into England.”

Regulus smiled. “So we just need to get past the wards.”

Thomas had already thought of that. “It’s fortuitous then that Lily’s son is counted among our number. Young Mr. Potter is going to be taking a field trip for us.”

A house-elf appeared and bowed low. “Guests is comings, Master Thomas.”

Thomas stood up. "It looks as though we're going to have to continue this some other time."

Lily checked the time. "I'd best apparate home and get changed." She picked up the bag containing the dress she'd told Severus she'd gone out to buy. "I'll be back shortly."

Everyone else also apparated out, leaving Thomas to go and greet his guests. He smiled as he came across Remus and Buffy. "I wasn't expecting anyone so soon."

"Mione had a few things she wanted to go through." Remus explained. "And so she asked me to drop by earlier than originally planned."

Thomas turned to Buffy. "Let me show you through to the sitting room." He then told Remus where to find Mione. "How are you enjoying your pregnancy?"

Buffy grimaced. "I don't think I'm one of those glowing mothers everyone talks about." She relaxed as she sat down. "But I'm sure you don't want to talk about my pregnancy."

Thomas realized that Buffy felt uncomfortable discussing her condition with him, and he changed the topic of conversation. Half an hour later, other guests began to arrive, and Buffy was soon taken under Narcissa's wing, as the two women were both due to deliver in October; Buffy feeling more relaxed talking to another woman.

As seven o'clock approached, Thomas frowned as he realized that Mione still wasn't down and he sent a house-elf to fetch his wife and Remus. Once Mione had arrived, apologizing profusely to Thomas, she took her place next to him as more guests began to arrive. And once all one hundred guests were there, dinner was served, with Thomas being thankful that magic existed. Afterwards everyone headed into the ballroom, and Mione excused herself, wanting to talk to Luna and Xander about work.

Thomas rolled his eyes and walked over to greet Rupert and his partner. "Perhaps you'd like to introduce me to your friend."

Rupert knew that Thomas was well aware of who he'd brought with him. "Thomas, this is Anna Jameson. Anna, this is Thomas Seville."

"Congratulations on your wedding anniversary, Mr. Seville." Anna held out her hand and shook Thomas'. "Bill tells me that you've been married for two years. I'm impressed. Most people wouldn't hold such a lavish party after such a short amount of time."

Thomas studied this world's Anna for a moment, as although he knew of her, he hadn't met her formally despite having seen her on occasion in St. Mungo's. "I believe my marriage to my wife is worth celebrating, no matter how long it's been. And please call me Thomas."

Anna smiled. "You must call me Anna then."

Thomas turned to Rupert. "So how did the two of you meet?"

"Anna recently started working at Gringotts in a position similar to my own." Rupert had been delighted to find his former fiancée was working there. "I took a chance and asked her out to dinner."

Anna laughed. "Given the difference in our ages, I think he was a little surprised when I said yes."

"I'm glad you did." Thomas informed her. "As although I know your parents well, up until now I hadn't had an opportunity to meet you."

"I spent most of my childhood out of the country." Anna informed him.

Thomas knew exactly where she'd spent it. "I understand you chose to study abroad at the Washington Academy for Girls rather than attending Hogwarts."

"A little like yourself, Thomas." Anna let Thomas know that she was as aware of his background as he was of hers. "Berowra Academy, I believe."

“As your parents may have mentioned, my parents live just outside of Sydney.” Thomas answered. “And they wanted their children close by rather than sending them overseas, even with Hogwarts’ reputation being what it is. Knowing Mack as I do, I’m surprised he let you go to school so far away.”

Anna wasn’t surprised that, despite the age difference, Thomas knew her father well enough to comment on his behavior, given that Mack, being a billionaire himself, moved in similar circles to Thomas and both men shared a lot of the same business interests. “I had to fight tooth and nail to go to Washington but Mother backed me up. By the time I left there I’d decided that I didn’t want anything to do with Dad’s companies, and I’ve gotten where I am today under my own steam. Because of that, I’ve been mostly based in US and Europe, which is probably why we haven’t met before.”

“I have actually seen you from a distance on two occasions.” Thomas informed her. “In St. Mungo’s.”

Anna couldn’t decide if Thomas was fishing or not. “I visit my former fiancé on a monthly basis. He’s a long term patient there.”

Thomas made Anna aware that he wasn’t fishing for information with his next comment. “Remus mentioned that you were once engaged to Rupert, and what happened to him.”

Anna was a little surprised when Thomas didn’t offer his condolences to her as most people did. “Then you know that the long term prognosis is dire with no hope of recovery.”

“I do.” Thomas confirmed.

“Which is why I decided to accept Bill’s invitation to your anniversary dinner tonight.” Anna decided that she might as well be honest. “I don’t believe Rupert would have wanted me to mourn his condition forever; something Remus agreed with.” Anna spotted the person in question behind Thomas. “Speaking of Remus, he just came in with Sirius so if you’ll excuse me, I’d like to go over and say hello to them both.”

Both men politely inclined their heads. Thomas raised an eyebrow when Anna had gone. "Interesting dinner partner, 'Bill'."

"My feelings for Anna have never changed." Rupert glanced over to where she was talking to his brother. "And neither have my feelings for Remus. Did you have to invite him and Buffy?"

"Yes." Thomas knew that Remus' presence would cause Rupert some discomfort. "My wife works for Remus, and it would be terribly rude if we'd omitted him and his very pregnant girlfriend from the guest list."

Rupert had a feeling that Thomas was enjoying his uneasiness. "I just hope he keeps away from me." He groaned as Anna pointed towards him. "But somehow I don't think that's going to happen."

Thomas smirked as the trio headed their way. "I hate to cut and run but if you'll excuse me, I see someone I want to speak to." Thomas headed over to Regulus who was on the other side of the room.

Also across the room, Harry Potter let out a long sigh just as Blaise and Ginny reached him, and he forced himself to smile at them. "I thought I saw you two right at the other end of the table."

"We're not all as favored as to be able to sit so close to our host as you and Daff did." Ginny remarked in a slightly snide voice. Unaware of Lily's position in the Inner Circle, Ginny had no idea that Harry had been placed there because he was Lily's apprentice. "Speaking of Daff, where is she?"

Harry scowled. "She left."

Ginny waited expectantly for Harry to explain; when he didn't she prompted him. "So, are you going to tell us why she left?"

Harry knew that if he didn't, Daphne, who'd become good friends with Ginny, would. "She was upset because I haven't asked her to marry me yet."

“Did the fact that this party is to celebrate our hosts’ wedding anniversary have anything to do with it?” Blaise enquired.

Harry nodded. “Daff was going on about how wonderful it was, and that this could be us in the near future. She didn’t take it too well when I told her that I had no intention of getting married anytime soon.”

Ginny, who had recently married Blaise, contemplated her friend's boyfriend. “You've got to get married sometime. Why not just ask Daff? You know you get on well, she's a pureblood, and her dowry would be sizeable.”

Harry sighed again. “Because when she was talking about marriage, I found myself trying to imagine being married to her, and I couldn’t.”

“Then don’t you think you should do the right thing, and end your relationship with her.” Ginny suggested. “I know plenty of people who'd be interested in seeing her. She's only said no up until now because she was holding out for you to propose.”

"It would have been nice if you'd bothered to tell me." Harry remarked, his voice curt.

"Come on, Harry." Blaise smirked at his friend. "It wouldn't have made any difference. Just admit that being with Daff is more about the sex than anything else."

Harry reluctantly agreed with his friend's assumption. "I admit I enjoy the benefits the relationship provides me with, and I really do like Daff. But as I told her, I'm just not ready to settle down yet. To be truthful, after tonight, even when do I, I don't think it's going to be with her."

"Then stop stringing Daff along." Ginny snapped, defending her friend. "It's not as if you can't find someone else to have sex with at the University."

Harry was well aware of that. "That's true, but I don't really have the time to invest in establishing another relationship, and I prefer to have a regular girlfriend."

Blaise raised an eyebrow. "And I thought you were in Slytherin."

Harry pulled a face at his former house mate. "Funny Blaise. We may all have indulged in casual sex then but now I'd rather be single than revert to something that has no meaning."

"So after you ditch Daff, there's no-one else you're interested in?" Blaise asked casually.

Harry shook his head. "No, Blaise. There isn't."

"Not even a certain young lady you're tutoring?" Blaise asked slyly, not noticing Thomas stiffen as he stood talking to Regulus, not more than ten feet away from them.

Harry made a sound of annoyance. "For fuck's sake, Blaise. How many times am I going to have to repeat myself? Mie is only fourteen, and we're just friends."

"But she's going to be fifteen next month." Blaise pointed out. "And I know you like her. Why else would you spend every weekend with her?"

Harry was getting exasperated, and hissed his response at his friend. "Blaise, I was more or less ordered to tutor her. I'm hardly going to disobey HIM, now am I?"

"But you don't tutor her on a Sunday." Blaise knew only too well what Harry's schedule was.

Harry was beginning to regret telling his friend. "No, I don't. But she's all alone and she needs a friend. And to be perfectly truthful, it's nice not to have to bloody well put up with this sort of shit all the time."

Blaise grinned. "That's what I like about you, Harry. You're so easy to wind-up."

"Look, Blaise. I'm going to go." Harry put down his untouched glass of champagne. "I have things I need to think about."

As his friends bid Harry goodnight, Thomas moved away, satisfied that his niece's tutor and self-proclaimed friend was just that. Regulus followed, wondering if Harry Potter knew how close he might have come to death if he'd given the wrong answer.

The Next Day

Harry ran a hand through his hair as he shakily sat down. The discussion between him and Daphne hadn't exactly been pretty, and her parting gesture was still evident on his right cheek. He scowled as he felt pain lance through his left arm. Apparating to his bedroom, he went into his closet, unlocked his trunk, picked out his mask and vanished. When he arrived at Castrum House, Harry found Dominus waiting for him at the apparition point, and he bowed low. "Good morning, Sir."

Thomas didn't hesitate with his request. "I want you to apparate me onto the Potter Estate, Harry."

Harry didn't dare ask why, and even though he knew that James would go ballistic if he ever found out what Harry had done, Harry was in no position to refuse. "It might take a moment longer than usual, Sir, as the wards will need to accept you."

"I'm well aware of that." Thomas held out his arm. "And I'd like to go now."

Harry apparated them both into an area that was out of view of the house. "Where would you like to go to, Sir?"

Thomas looked around him. "Is there a river on this property?"

Harry nodded. "There are two."

“Describe them.” Thomas ordered.

Harry did so, suddenly remembering something else. “And there’s also an old river bed.”

After learning that the old river bed was on the English side of the property, Thomas decided that the final option would be his first choice. “Let’s go.”

Afterwards, Harry was apparated directly to Thomas’ rooms where Thomas withdrew his wand making Harry wince. Instead of being punished, however, Thomas simply obliterated Harry before sending him to see Cammie.

October 29th 2005

Harry stood in front of Dominus and his mother. He bowed low to both of them, before addressing Dominus. “You asked to see me, Sir?”

“I did.” Thomas indicated that Harry should sit down.

Lily took off her mask. “Harry, you can take off your mask as well.”

Harry did as he was bidden, wondering why he’d been called. “Is this about Mie?”

Lily’s face tightened slightly. “No, it’s not.”

Thomas tapped his own mask so that it reverted to a three-quarter length. “We’ll talk after breakfast.”

Harry felt surreal having breakfast with Dominus and his mother, and he remained silent as the two of them chatted casually. Eventually, however, Dominus turned his attention to Harry once more. “You may not be aware of this but even though you’re already your mother’s apprentice, I refused to allow her to mark you. However, your mother has since made a request of me which, as I owe her a life debt, I find myself obliged to agree to.”

Harry didn't have to be a genius to deduce what his mother had requested, and Lily confirmed his supposition. "Dominus has agreed to remove his mark and allow me to mark you in repayment of that life debt."

Even expecting it, Harry still couldn't stop the shock that ran across his face. "Now?"

Thomas shook his head. "Your mother has chosen Samhain for the ritual to take place." He stood up. "I need to visit my ward but I'll see you on Monday, Harry. Lily can answer questions you may have."

Harry and Lily both stood up and inclined their heads as Thomas left. Harry turned to his mother. "Why?"

Lily countered with a question. "Don't you want to take my mark?"

"Of course I do." Harry hurriedly responded, not wanting to irritate his mother. "But why on Samhain?"

"It's the Day of the Dead, Harry." Lily told Harry what he already knew. "And as it's the day you'll be making your first kill, I thought it fitting."

"My first kill?" Harry wanted to make sure he'd heard Lily right.

Lily smiled. "Yes. Dominus now requires all new recruits to do the same."

"But I'm not a new recruit, so why is it necessary?" Harry asked.

"Because as my apprentice, on any future skirmishes you'll be by my side, and I can't afford for you to freeze up the first time you need to make a kill." Lily explained. "So your first kill will be made in controlled circumstances."

"Controlled circumstances?" Harry again parroted Lily's words. "What do you mean?"

“I’m going to choose a victim for you, and then you’ll use the killing curse to dispatch them.” Lily could see the disquiet that marred her son’s face. “You look worried. It’s not as if you haven’t used the killing curse before.”

“That was killing animals.” Harry pointed out. “Not another person.”

Lily placed a hand on Harry’s shoulder; feeling her son shaking beneath it. “You needn’t be concerned. It won’t be a wizard or witch you’ll be targeting; I’m choosing a Muggle for you.”

Harry acted relieved, knowing that that was what Lily expected. “That’s different then. Anyone I know?”

Lily smiled proudly; her concerns vanishing with Harry’s response. “No, I won’t make a decision until Monday.”

Wanting to get out, Harry glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. “I’d best be off, Mum.”

Lily’s smile vanished. “It’s time for your lesson with Mie, isn’t it?”

“You don’t like her, do you?” Harry realized.

“Not particularly, and I don’t like the fact that you spend so much time with her.” Lily informed her son. “If Dominus hadn’t agreed to it, I would have stopped you from seeing her.”

Harry frowned. “What is it about her you don’t like?”

Lily couldn’t tell Harry the truth, and so she lied instead. “It’s more about the age difference between the two of you rather than a true dislike.”

“Mum, I’m tutoring her, not dating her.” Harry pointed out. “I admit I consider Mie my friend but there’s nothing romantic between us.”

“But she’s only just turned fifteen, Harry.” Lily argued. “And you’re nineteen. That’s still quite an age difference, even for friends.”

“She seems much older.” Harry informed his mother, not realizing that Cammie’s captivity had forced her to grow up very quickly. “And as Dominus has approved my friendship with her, unless you have a very good reason for my breaking it off, I think it’s a good idea that I continue it.”

Lily scowled as Harry reminded her of her lack of power in that area. “I’m well aware of that, Harry. Just be careful.”

“Mum, don’t worry.” Harry kissed Lily’s cheek. “Mie’s a friend, and that’s all she’ll ever be.”

Lily hoped that that really was the case. “I still wish you hadn’t broken it off with Daphne.”

“I didn’t love her.” Harry hadn’t really talked to Lily about the break-up. “And it wasn’t fair to let her think that there would be any chance of my asking her to marry me.”

Lily had always told Harry and Katherine that she’d rather they marry for love; something she sometimes regretted when she thought about who Katherine had married. “I understand.”

Harry glanced again at the clock. “I really must go. Mie and I have a lot to get through.”

Lily hugged her son. “And I must get back to Hogwarts. I’ll see you here at ten on Monday morning.”

“I’ll be here.” Harry promised. With that, he slid his mask on and hurried out of his mother’s rooms.

Cammie opened the door when she heard a knock. “Hugh, you’re late.”

Harry didn't answer as he entered before sitting down heavily on the sofa, his shaking legs refusing to hold him up any longer.

Cammie shut the door and turned around to where Harry was sitting. "Hugh, are you okay?"

Harry shook his head. "Not really."

"Can I do something?" Cammie was worried by the desolate tone in Harry's voice.

"Get me a brandy." Harry rarely drank, and usually only on special occasions, but he needed a drink at that moment more than he'd ever done before.

Cammie quickly called Mitzy and a few moments later she passed Harry the requested drink, watching as he consumed it in one go. "Hugh, do you want to talk about it?"

Harry again shook his head. "We need to get to work."

The rest of the morning was spent poring over history and potions. Eventually Cammie's lessons were over, and Harry closed his text books. "Do you have any homework that you need to get done?"

Cammie shook her head. "It's just spellwork that I practice at night."

"Then let's go for a walk." Harry stood up and vanished.

Cammie, who had mastered apparition under Thomas' instruction, also vanished, reappearing in the gardens. "Hugh, will you..."

"Not here." Harry led Cammie to the bench that was furthest away from the house before sitting down.

Cammie sat next to him. "Please tell me what's wrong."

Harry took a deep breath and told her. "I have to take my mother's mark. Dominus is going to be removing his."

“Why?” Cammie couldn’t see why Lily was bothering.

“Because Dominus owed Mum a life debt, and this is what she asked for.” Harry informed Cammie.

“You seem awfully upset about it.” Cammie observed.

“And with good reason.” Harry took yet another deep breath. “I have to make a first kill before my mother marks me.”

“Oh Merlin.” Cammie’s hand flew to her exposed mouth. “When?”

“Monday.” Harry said quietly. “But I’m not sure if I can do it.”

“Can’t you say no?” Cammie knew the answer already but still asked the question.

“Not if I want to live, I can’t.” Harry couldn’t help the bitter note that invaded his voice.

“Run away then.” Cammie suggested.

Harry rolled up his left sleeve. “Dominus can find me through this.”

Cammie couldn’t help but stare at the Dark Mark that marred Harry’s arm. “Does it hurt?”

Harry sucked in his breath as Cammie reached out to trace the mark. “Occasionally. Dominus uses it to call meetings, and then it hurts briefly. But I know he can also use it to punish a person.”

Cammie withdrew her hand. “So you’re going to go through with it?”

“What else can I do?” Harry asked.

“Ask for help.” Cammie advised.

“Who from?” Harry didn’t see that there was anyone who could help him.

Cammie only knew of one person who might be able to help Harry. “Go to Harry Sebastian.”

Harry laughed. “The Auror? Are you mad, Mie? He’d take one look at my Dark Mark and throw me into Azkaban.”

“You don’t know that.” Cammie countered.

“It’s where all Death Eaters that are caught end up, and then Dominus will send my mother to execute me.” Harry told Cammie.

Cammie was well aware of what Lily was capable of, but she couldn’t see her killing her own son. “You’re her son, Hugh. She wouldn’t do that to you.”

Harry believed differently. “She killed her own sister, Mie.”

Cammie was horrified. “Why?”

“Because Dominus ordered her to.” Harry said simply. “He’s her master and she does as she’s told.”

“So you really think she’d kill you?” Cammie’s voice was still full of horror.

Harry reluctantly nodded. “I think she would. She despises cowards and traitors, and I’d be considered both.”

“So what are you going to do?” Cammie asked.

Harry shook his head. “I really don’t know, Mie. I don’t want to kill anyone but I don’t want to die either.”

“Hugh, go to Harry Sebastian. If anyone can help you, he can.” Cammie urged.

Harry was filled with curiosity. "How do you know that?"

"Because he knows more about Dominus than anyone else I know." Cammie responded.

"You know him?" Harry latched onto the final part of Cammie's statement.

Cammie realized that she'd said more than she should have. "Yes, but don't ask me how."

"If I'm going to risk my life to try and gain an audience with a man I know is likely to send me to Azkaban, then I need to know why." Harry countered.

Minutes passed as Cammie fell silent. Harry took her hand. "Mie, you can tell me. I promise I won't tell anyone."

Cammie looked around before getting up and twisting so that her back was to the house. Taking a deep breath she removed her mask. "I know him because he's my Uncle."

Harry immediately let go of Cammie's hand. "Is this some sort of joke?"

Cammie replaced her mask, knowing she'd already taken a terrible risk. "It's no joke, Hugh."

"You're supposed to be dead." Harry by now had also gotten to his feet.

Cammie sighed. "But I'm not. How long have you known that I've existed, Hugh?"

Harry thought back. "If you are who you claim to be, then since your father adopted you."

"I don't mean that." Cammie told him. "I meant how long have you known I've existed as Dominus' ward?"

“Since the start of January.” Harry responded easily.

“And when was my memorial service, Hugh?” Cammie enquired.

“The start of January.” Harry responded as he started to put two and two together. “You really are Cammie Sebastian, aren’t you?” Harry then realized something else. “Which means it was you who helped Sebastian escape from my mother. It was your fault that she was tortured.”

“She wasn’t exactly being nice to my Uncle, so please don’t try and tell me that she didn’t deserve it.” Cammie retorted.

Harry, like Cammie, knew exactly what his mother was capable of, and found himself unable to defend her. “But why tell me who you are now?”

“Because I want you to go to Uncle Harry.” Cammie told him. “He’ll help you if you tell him I sent you.”

“He’ll never believe me.” Harry argued. “I can barely believe it myself. I can’t go to him, Mie.”

Cammie flopped down onto the bench. “Then don’t bother coming back, Hugh. If you carry out your first kill, then I don’t want to see you again.”

Harry's heart sank at her words but he still felt obliged to point something out. “Mie, if that's what you want, then whatever choice I make, I’m not going to see you again.”

"Then make the right one, Hugh." Cammie implored. "Go to Uncle Harry."

Harry shook his head. "I don't think I can, Mie."

“Then I guess that this is our last goodbye then.” With that, Cammie apparated away and to her room, before ripping off her mask and throwing herself onto her bed, huge sobs wracking her body.

As Cammie vanished, Harry swore and stalked angrily towards the apparition point. Once there, he apparated back to his room at the University, and, as Cammie had, ripped off his mask and threw himself onto his bed. Only Harry didn't cry. He just lay there staring at the ceiling as he contemplated the biggest decision of his life.

Two options lay before him. He could do the right thing; he could go to Sebastian and tell him his niece was still alive but Harry knew that he'd end up in Azkaban and would effectively have signed his own death warrant if he did so. Or he could take the easy option and do as Lily wanted; simply close his eyes and incant the killing curse. Two simple words but they were two simple words that would mean he'd lose his cousin's friendship forever.

Harry hit the wall with his fist in frustration. Six month ago, he knew that he wouldn't have hesitated. He would have done as Lily demanded. Now, despite his words to Cammie, Harry really didn't know what to do, and as the night became day, Harry still had no idea.

Next Chapter: Harry Potter makes his decision.

Chapter 49: A Tough Time

30th October 2005

Aware that he wasn't going to get things done if he lay there any longer, Harry Potter rolled off his bed before disappearing. He reappeared at Snape Manor in his bedroom, where he opened his closet and unlocked the trunk he kept in there. After getting what he needed, he left.

In her room, Cammie pushed her breakfast around the plate in a half-hearted attempt at eating. Eventually she gave in and got up, put on her mask and headed out into the gardens. An hour later, at the sound of footsteps on the gravel path that encircled the house, she glanced up to find Harry standing in front of her. "What do you want? I told you yesterday that I didn't want to see you again."

"I need to talk to you. Come with me." Harry ordered, intending to make his way to the bench that they'd sat on the previous day. When Cammie didn't move, Harry turned around, grabbed her hand and pulled her along behind him, before sitting her down. He then began pacing in front of the bench. "I didn't sleep last night."

"You're not alone." Cammie's voice was terse.

"Mie, I'm going to go to your Uncle." Harry bit out his words, anxiety making them harsher than he intended.

Cammie barely noticed, as the misery of the previous night vanished at Harry's words. "Hugh, I'm so pleased you've changed your mind. At least now my parents and Uncle Harry will know I'm alright after all."

"You can tell them yourself." Harry took out a plain white mask from under his cloak. "You're coming with me."

Cammie stared at the mask in Harry's hand for several long moments before shaking her head. "I can't leave, Hugh."

“Why not?” Harry had expected Cammie to be excited, not to refuse his offer.

Cammie had been warned by Dominus as to why not. “I don’t have a Dark Mark; the wards will rip me apart if I try to leave.”

Harry was relieved to find that her reason was one that could be easily circumvented. “Mie, I can apparate you through the wards.”

Too afraid that he might be mistaken, Cammie urged Harry to go alone. “Just leave, Hugh. I can’t take the chance you’re wrong.”

Harry explained more. “As long as you are being apparated by someone with a Dark Mark, then the wards won’t activate.”

“You mean that I could have gotten free before now?” Cammie’s voice was full of shock.

Harry quickly disabused her of her idea. “Not unless you could have found a Death Eater willing to take you. And somehow I have the feeling that I’m the only one who is.” He held out the mask again. “Trust me.”

Even though she was still afraid but trusting Harry, Cammie reached out and took the white mask. “What do I have to do?”

“Put on the mask, follow me, and say nothing.” Harry instructed. “I know you’re really frightened; hell, I am, but don’t let it show. We’re going to be leaving through the main ballroom. There were quite a few Death Eaters in there when I arrived, so don’t panic and think that they’re there because of you; they’re not. After we cross the ballroom, we’ll reach the apparition room. I’ll take you out from there.”

Cammie turned her back to the house as she removed her silver embossed mask before replacing it with the white one. “What should I do with this?”

“Give it to me.” Harry took the discarded mask from Cammie and placed it under his cloak. “I’m going to apparate us directly to the

Ministry. Whatever you do, don't raise your wands, and try to stay calm. I don't want to escape from here only for an Auror to do the job for Dominus."

Cammie was shaking. "I'm ready."

Harry transfigured her clothing to standard Death Eater garb. "Just remember what I said, and follow me."

Cammie followed Harry back to the house and into the forbidden ballroom. She was sure that everyone would be able to hear her heart as it was pounding so loudly, and she tried not to look around too much as she walked through the ballroom. Up until then it was somewhere she'd never been allowed to enter, except for when she'd first been brought into the house and when she'd borne witness to a marking; something that had only happened once as she'd been sick afterwards.

Harry pushed open the doors to the apparition area and was relieved to find it empty. He closed them behind him, before giving instructions to Cammie. "Stand behind me and put your arms around my waist."

Realizing that Harry was doing it to protect her in case anyone did fire a spell off at them, Cammie squeezed his waist gently in thanks. "I can't believe I'm going to be safe again, Hugh. Thank you."

"I'd hold that thought. We're not out of the woods yet." Harry said softly as the pair disappeared.

BritAD

In the dueling room at BritAD, Harry pulled H.J. to his feet. "I'm quick enough to defend against the threefold spell, H.J., you're not. You might want to consider using some of those newer evasive tactics you've been learning about."

"I was." H.J. groaned, and rubbed his head. "Did you have to blast me that hard?"

Harry's face was serious as he took his place again. "Yes. As Dominus and his men won't give you any quarter, neither will I. Again, H.J."

H.J. raised his wand, only for Harry to hold up his hand. H.J. knew something must be up. "What's wrong?"

"My ring is vibrating." Harry holstered his wand. "We'll pick this up later."

"I'll come too." H.J. also holstered his wand, before taking Harry's arm to allow his brother to apparate them directly to the Ops Room.

Harry approached the Auror on duty at the desk. "What's up?"

Dick Goldstein held out a slip of parchment. "Two Death Eaters, a man and a woman, have been apprehended in the main foyer, Sir. They've been taken to Cells 10A and 10B. I was also about to alert Commander Black."

Harry signed the action slip. "I'll deal with it. Why wasn't there a general alert?"

Goldstein explained. "They offered no resistance, Sir, and gave up their wands without a fight." Goldstein handed over the wands. "One of them also had this under his cloak."

Both Harry and H.J. sucked in their breaths at the sight of the silver mask.

Harry took it off the Auror as Goldstein continued speaking. "The man who had this actually asked for you by name, Sir. He's in Cell 10A."

In the light of the mask in his hand, Harry decided it might be a trap. "I'm going to instigate a lockdown. Have all available Aurors in the building assemble here."

"Yes, Sir." Goldstein sent the signal as Harry had ordered.

Harry then took out his wand, and tapped his ring several times. Alarms began to blare throughout the Ministry as the entire building was placed under a lockdown. "H.J., as you can't leave, and you're going to be covering interview techniques in your classes over the next few weeks, you may as well get some firsthand experience."

H.J. wanted to tell Harry that he'd interviewed prisoners before, but he had the feeling that his own way of interviewing them wouldn't sit well with neither the Ministry nor Harry. "Thanks."

Now that he'd instigated the lockdown, Harry couldn't apparate between sites, so he and H.J. headed on foot to the cells, passing Aurors running to answer the alarm Harry had just initiated. "As he's asked for me personally, I think we'll deal with the prisoner in 10A first."

As Harry and H.J. entered the cell in question, Harry locked the door and began by warning the prisoner. "For the purposes of this interview, I should warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you. My name is Auror Harry Sebastian and this is Trainee Auror Sebastian. Please state your own name for the records."

The Death Eater removed his red mask. "Harry James Potter."

Both Harry and H.J. were astounded. Harry sat down. "Why did you ask to see me specifically? Why not ask for Commander Black?"

"Because Mie told me that you would be able to help me." Harry Potter just hoped she was right. Harry wasn't exactly looking at him with a particularly friendly eye.

Harry frowned. "I don't know anyone named Mie."

"It's what I call your niece, Cammie." Harry clarified.

H.J.'s face contorted at the mention of his daughter. "Is this some sort of joke, Potter? My daughter is dead."

“No, Sir, she isn’t.” Harry Potter hadn’t expected Cammie’s father to be there, and found that he was more than a little unnerved by the fact, something he didn’t realize that Harry was picking up on.

“Dominus himself sent me a letter telling me otherwise, you sick fuck.” As he was speaking, H.J. lunged across the table, Harry grabbing him before he could do anything foolish.

Harry’s voice was firm as he snapped out an order. “H.J., sit down.”

H.J. reluctantly sat down, only to begin to berate Harry Potter again. “Do you have...”

Harry interrupted him. “Sebastian, I suggest you wait for me outside.”

H.J. got up and left, but not before glaring at Harry Potter. After locking the door again, Harry returned his attention to the young man. “Let’s say I believe you, Potter, and my niece is still alive. Why should I help you? You are a Death Eater, aren’t you?”

In response, Harry Potter rolled up his left sleeve to reveal the Dark Mark. “I am but I don’t want to be.”

“So because you had a change of heart, you thought you could simply stroll in here and ask for my help?” Harry’s voice was hard and full of sarcasm.

“I tried to tell Mie you wouldn’t help me, but she was adamant that you would.” Harry Potter’s voice was bitter. “I said that you’d laugh in my face, and ship me off to Azkaban.”

“Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t.” Harry demanded.

“I can give you two.” Harry Potter just hoped they’d be enough. “I’ve just helped your niece to escape; she’s the other person who was with me. And if you send me to Azkaban you’ll be signing my death warrant.”

“You’re afraid that Dominus will send one of his men after you, aren’t you?” Harry asked, sensing the boy’s fear.

“I know Dominus will send someone after me.” Harry Potter responded, glad that both H.J. and Harry had used Dominus’ name first. “I’ve taken a prisoner from under his nose, and I’ve betrayed both him and my... someone else.”

“Who else?” Harry enquired.

“I can’t tell you that.” Harry Potter knew his next words would condemn his mother. “But Mie can.”

Harry got up. “I hope for your sake that you’re telling the truth, Potter.” As he stepped outside, he ordered one of the Aurors on duty to enter the room.

Before going into the next cell along the corridor, Harry stopped to caution his brother. “H.J., the next time I give you an order in front of a prisoner, I expect you to follow it.”

H.J. got to his feet. “You can’t really believe what he said about Cammie.”

“It’s immaterial whether I believe it or not.” Harry could sense that H.J. was still full of animosity. “The whole point of interviewing someone is to try and find out the truth.”

“The truth? The truth is that Potter’s a Death Eater, Harry, and like all Death Eaters, he’s a lying, conniving, son of a bitch.” H.J. retorted angrily.

“H.J., you have to learn to leave your personal feelings behind when you interview someone.” Harry lectured his brother. “I’m angry about Potter as well but I’ve got to reserve judgment until I check to find out whether he’s telling the truth about Cammie.”

Cognizant of the fact that the second prisoner was a woman, H.J. glanced at the door to the next cell. “She’s in there?”

“Potter is claiming that Cammie was the woman who was with him.” Harry placed a hand on H.J.’s shoulder at the look on his brother’s face. “And before you ask, I can’t let you in there.”

“Harry, I don’t see why not. We both know it isn’t her.” H.J. struggled to contain his anger. “Dominus wouldn’t have let her survive for helping you.”

“What if he did, H.J.?” Harry didn’t think so, but he had to look at all of the possibilities. “I can’t just ignore the fact that Potter could be telling the truth, as farfetched as it sounds.”

“Harry, let me sit in on the interview.” H.J. pleaded as he unwillingly felt a tiny of glimmer of hope spring to life.

A glimmer that Harry detected. “I can’t, H.J.” Harry’s voice was gentle as he refused. “If it isn’t her, and I doubt it will be, you’re going to be bitterly disappointed.”

H.J. couldn’t face sitting outside the room and waiting alone. “Please, Harry, as your brother, I’m asking you to let me sit in.”

“And as your brother, I can’t bear to see you hurt all over again when you find out that it isn’t her.” A few months after learning about Cammie’s death, Harry and H.J. had carried out a ritual to truly make them brothers. They’d both been surprised when the ritual had failed, only to discover that it had failed because the magic had already considered them to be blood brothers. Harry had presumed it was because H.J. had taken over Jamie’s body.

When H.J. sank dejectedly back into his chair, Harry opened the door to Cammie’s cell to find a white-masked Death Eater sitting in the chair. He closed and locked the door behind him as the Death Eater addressed him as ‘Uncle Harry’ in a nervous and excited voice. Harry held up a hand. “For the purposes of this interview you will address me as Auror Sebastian.”

Cammie subsided as Harry gave her the same spiel he'd given Harry Potter, finishing with the request for her name. As she gave it, Cammie removed her mask. "Camille Sebastian."

Now that she'd removed her mask, Harry could sense fear, hope, and nervousness rolling off the girl. He knew that as much as he wanted to believe it was Cammie, he couldn't take her at face value, even though she smelt like his niece. "Let's start simply. How long have you been a Death Eater?"

Cammie denied she was. "I'm not. I don't have a Dark Mark."

"Then perhaps you'd like to tell me who this belongs to." Harry slid the silver mask onto the table.

"It's mine." Cammie immediately admitted.

"Now correct me if I'm wrong, but don't only members of the Inner Circle wear a mask like this?" Harry didn't actually expect her to confirm his question.

"Yes but I'm not a member of it, Unc..." Cammie fell silent as Harry held up his hand again.

Harry repeated his earlier demand. "As I've already said, I'd prefer it if you called me Auror Sebastian, and not Uncle Harry."

It hadn't occurred to Cammie that Harry might doubt her identity. "You are my Uncle, and I'm not lying about who I am." At Harry's derisory look, Cammie quickly deduced that Harry thought she might be a Death Eater using polyjuice potion. She set out to alleviate his fears. "Auror Sebastian." Cammie deliberately enunciated his name. "If I'm polyjuiced as you so obviously believe I am, then why do I look older and taller than when I helped to rescue you?"

Harry had to personally allow the point, but was unwilling to tell the girl in front of him that he had, and he brought up another possibility. "A glamour could do that."

“Then check me for a glamour.” Cammie’s voice was full of desperation, as she really needed Harry to believe her. “Please.”

Harry pulled out his wand and did every spell he had knowledge of but nothing changed. “So you’re not wearing a spell-linked glamour.” He decided to use the girl’s claim as to her identity to try and find out what he couldn’t remember about the night that Cammie had helped him. “If you are who you say you are, then I’d like to talk about the night you helped me to escape. Tell me what happened.”

Cammie immediately launched into a brief description about the night. “I made my way through the air vents, stunned the Death Eater torturing you, and freed you from your chains before we escaped back through the vents. You then passed out before making it to safety, so I went back for you before eventually activating your Aurors’ emergency ring.”

Harry found that he’d learnt very little. “Anyone who found the Death Eater could have deduced that.”

Cammie thought quickly. “And how would they know that you’re not from this world, and you’re supposed to be the one who will kill Dominus?”

Now Harry’s attention was piqued, but he didn’t reveal it. “Nice story but a little farfetched.”

Cammie could feel herself growing angry. “You told me yourself when we were making our way towards the wards.”

“I told you?” Sensing Cammie’s anger, Harry laughed disparagingly. “You’ll have to do better than that.”

Cammie snapped at Harry. “Why won’t you believe me?”

“Because you’re a Death Eater.” Aware that Dominus could have ripped anything he needed to know from Cammie’s mind, Harry’s laughter died away as he leant across the table. “And I think it’s time

you started telling me why you and your friend next door are really here.”

“I’m here because I am your niece, and I thought you’d be able to help Hugh.” Cammie was beginning to feel frustrated. “And…”

“Hugh?” Harry smiled nastily as he questioned Cammie’s name usage. “Perhaps the two of you should have actually bothered to compare stories before you walked in here.”

Cammie found herself at a loss. “I don’t understand.”

Aware that she was telling the truth, Harry decided to spell it out for her. “While your friend in there actually managed to remember to use the name of the girl you’re claiming to be, you seem to have forgotten that he’s masquerading as Harry Potter. So tell me, what’s Hugh’s full name?”

“Harry Potter?” Cammie repeated. “But he’s my cousin.”

“Which is a nice touch.” Harry was now glad he hadn’t let H.J. sit in. “You could both spin a touching story of how he found out it was you, and he couldn’t live with the guilt of knowing you’d been held against your will for all this time.”

“Why would he do that?” Cammie asked the question more of herself than her Uncle, as she struggled to assimilate the fact that Hugh might Harry Potter. “I barely know Harry Potter.”

“Something that’s made abundantly clear by the fact that you’re calling him Hugh.” Harry got up, deciding he’d better let H.J. know what was happening. “Excuse me.”

H.J. shot to his feet as Harry left the cell. “Well?”

“I’m sorry, H.J.” Harry hated that he’d been right. “Look, why don’t you go up to my office, and wait for me there?”

At that moment, the door to Harry Potter's cell opened, interrupting anything H.J. might have said. The guard who had gone in came hurrying up to Harry. "Sir, something is happening to him."

Harry hurried into the cell to find the Death Eater grasping his left arm, and gasping with pain. Harry dropped the wards in the cell, and ripped up the boy's sleeve to reveal a Dark Mark that was pulsating and red. "He's obviously failed at something. We need to find out what." As Harry Potter's gasps turned to moans of pain, Harry looked over his shoulder at H.J. "H.J. I need you to fetch someone for me. Her name is Anna Jameson."

"Harry, I want to see this son of a bitch die, not run an errand." H.J. argued, totally unmoved by Harry Potter's tears and moans of distress.

"I want to know what he knows." Harry snapped. "Now do your job and fetch her. You'll find her at 210 Dorchester Drive, Manchester. It's apparition point 47. Tell her I have a Code A." Harry dropped the lockdown in just the cell area. "You can apparate from here."

H.J. hesitated, incurring Harry's wrath again. "I said now, Sebastian."

H.J. reluctantly vanished to the apparition point. And Harry Potter was left alone with his pain as Harry let go of him, re-warded the area, and also vanished.

When Harry returned a few minutes later, a notebook in his hand, Harry Potter had begun screaming, and didn't really seem to even notice that Harry was in the room. "Come on, H.J."

Five minutes later, H.J. and Anna appeared, and Harry immediately reinstated the localized lockdown. Anna addressed Harry. "Show me."

While he'd been waiting, Harry had already transfigured the table into a bed, and had lifted the now unconscious but still screaming Harry Potter onto it. He pointed to the reddened Dark Mark. "It's a

bastardized protean charm. I need you to disarm the link that will kill him.”

Anna began studying it. “How long?”

“Two, maybe three minutes.” Harry didn’t know for sure.

“That’s impossible.” Anna could already see how complex the charm was.

Harry tapped the notebook that had once belonged to his mother, and directions appeared in the air. “I’d have done it myself but I knew you’d be quicker, even given the time you had to take to get here.” Harry knew he could have started but wasn’t sure exactly how Anna worked, and he hadn’t wanted to slow her down.

Anna read through the first five steps and got to work. Three minutes later, she sat down, breathing heavily. “It’s done.”

Harry turned to H.J. who had stood silently the entire time Anna had been working on the boy. “Fetch Healer Bronson.”

Once again, H.J. hesitated. Harry had had enough. “Sebastian, are you deaf?”

“No, Sir.” H.J. turned on his heel and headed out.

“What’s up with him?” Anna asked, in between bites of the large piece of chocolate she’d fished out of her pocket.

“He hates Death Eaters.” Harry ran a hand through his hair. “And he has a serious problem with authority.”

“Normally you’d have jumped down his throat.” Anna glanced over at the now silent young man. “So what gives?”

Since Anna had the same security clearance as he did, Harry told her about Cammie. “I was going to cut him some slack but disobeying me three times is twice too often.”

“Don’t be too hard on him.” Anna got up yawning. “As my job here is done, and I’m exhausted, I’ll be off. I’ll send you a bill for my services.”

“How is the job at Gringotts going?” Harry stopped her from leaving, wanting to know how her assignment was going.

“There’s definitely something up with Weasley, but I haven’t figured out what it is yet.” Anna was frustrated that it was taking her so long. “It’s odd but sometimes I feel as though I know him well, yet we’ve only been out on nine or ten dates at most.”

Harry trusted Anna’s judgment, and that she’d tell them if anything important occurred. “Keep me posted. I’ll drop the lockdown for twenty seconds for you.”

“I will, and thanks.” Anna apparated out just as H.J. returned with the healer.

As Harry Potter was being seen to, Harry dragged his brother outside. “H.J. I understand that you’re frustrated and stressed but when I give you an order I expect you to follow it.”

“Harry, he’s a bloody Death Eater.” H.J. glared at Harry. “I couldn’t give a shit if he dies.”

“H.J. Just in case you didn’t notice, the mask he was wearing means that he’s an apprentice. I’m guessing he’s either Dominus’ apprentice or the woman’s in the other room. Now for some reason he’s obviously fucked up, and I intend to find out why, either from that boy or his lying sidekick.” Harry kept his voice low but authoritative. “And if you ever obstruct me like that again, you’ll find yourself busted down to first year trainee, brother or no brother. Do I make myself clear, Sebastian?”

“Yes, Sir.” H.J. discovered that he almost felt intimidated by his brother, and finally understood why most of the trainees didn’t

particularly enjoy being scrutinized by Harry. "I'll sit and wait for you here."

Harry didn't bother to smile at H.J. as he headed back into the girl's cell. He was a little surprised to find that she hadn't changed but given that his own world's Severus had come up with a longer lasting polyjuice, it wasn't beyond the bounds of imagination that this world's potion masters could do the same. "Nice polyjuice potion you've managed to come up with, especially the aging technique."

"Even if I had managed to age myself, we both know that polyjuice only lasts an hour maximum." Cammie was getting fed up with Harry's accusations. "So you must know by now that I'm telling the truth about who I am."

"I know nothing of the sort." Harry could feel Cammie's frustration at him. "So let's pick up our conversation again. You should know that I've just had to save your friend next door from Dominus' wrath. Who knows, perhaps you'll be next."

Cammie paled. "He's here?"

Harry didn't answer her question. "So what did the two of you do wrong that meant you'd run to me and the threat of Azkaban rather than facing Dominus?"

"You know very well what we've done." Cammie's voice grew louder as she began to get angry again. "And you didn't answer my question."

"Do you really think I'd be here questioning you if Dominus was here?" Harry made sure he got across his contempt that she'd even bothered to ask the question, let alone expected an answer. "We both know that Dominus can reach you without needing to be in the same room."

Cammie remembered what Harry had told her about the Dark Mark. "He attacked Hugh through his Dark Mark, didn't he?"

“Give yourself a pat on the back.” Harry’s voice retained its sarcastic tenor. “And while you claim not to have a Dark Mark, I’m quite sure that there’s another way he can get to you.” Harry’s sharp eyes didn’t miss Cammie’s almost imperceptible glance at her finger, and he continued. “So I suggest you start telling me the truth. You might not be as fortunate as your friend.”

“I am telling the truth.” Cammie didn’t know what else she could say to convince Harry.

Harry nodded towards her hand. “Your ring. Did he give you that?”

Cammie touched the ring in question. “Yes.”

Harry could feel guilt rolling off the girl. “Does it replace the Dark Mark?”

“Sort of.” Cammie rolled the ring around her finger. “It allowed me to apparate anywhere in Castrum House.”

Harry finally felt as if he was getting somewhere. “Castrum House?”

“It’s Dominus’ house but he doesn’t live there.” Cammie explained. “He just visits when he has a meeting or to see me.”

“Are you his mistress?” Harry asked the obvious question.

And Cammie was disgusted by it. “No!”

Harry couldn’t miss the abhorrence the girl felt at the query. “Okay, so if you’re not sleeping with him, why didn’t he mark you? Why give you a ring instead?”

“He gave it to me for...” Cammie stopped speaking as she realized how Harry would take her answer.

“You may as well finish the sentence. I’ll find out one way or another.” Harry could see guilt and fear written all over Cammie’s face.

Afraid of what he might do, Cammie answered. "He gave it to me for mastering the Imperius curse."

Harry began to wonder exactly what kind of a relationship the girl sitting in front of him actually had with Dominus, and he wondered if she might be his daughter. "What other Unforgivables have you mastered?"

"None." Cammie responded half-truthfully.

"Do you really expect me to believe that?" Harry's voice conveyed his disbelief.

"If you're going to question everything I say, why don't you just give me Veritaserum?" Cammie wished that she'd come up with the idea earlier.

"Because most, if not all, Death Eaters are immune to it." Harry pointed out. "And that would include you."

"Ahhh!" Cammie let out a frustrated scream. "I can't bloody win. You won't believe me no matter what I say." She held out her hand. "Give me a wand and I'll swear an oath."

"Do you really expect me to give you a wand?" Harry asked in an amused voice.

"Hold it then while I swear the oath." Cammie hesitated. "You can do that, can't you?"

"I can." Harry confirmed. "But I'm not willing to allow you to kill yourself by lying under oath."

Cammie hit the table, as she finally lost her temper. "How the fuck can I prove that I am who I say I am if you block me at every turn?"

"You can't." Harry smiled at her, knowing he'd pushed her over the edge. "And my niece would never use language like that."

“You are so fucking wrong.” Cammie swore again to prove her point. “And I don’t care how you do it, just find some way to let me prove that I’m telling the damn truth.”

Harry got up. “Excuse me.”

H.J. rose to his feet when Harry came out. “You don’t look happy.”

“I’m not but I have found out some useful information.” Harry didn’t reveal what it was as they were standing outside in a corridor. “I need three vials of paternity potion.”

“Why?” H.J. asked.

“Because I can’t use Veritaserum to prove she’s lying, and I’m not about to let her kill herself by swearing an oath to avoid answering my questions.” Harry told him. “So will you walk down to the potions lab and procure some for me? I’m going to get something to eat. After you’ve fetched the potion, take a break yourself.”

“Harry, I’ll get the potion but I really want to sit in with you when you go back in.” H.J. didn’t dare simply demand entrance but he wanted to see the girl who was masquerading as his daughter.

“Okay but one misstep and I will carry out my earlier threat.” Harry warned.

“I won’t say anything.” H.J. promised, and then set out to get the potion that Harry had requested.

An hour later, Cammie stared in amazement at the second man who entered the room with her Uncle. “Dad!”

H.J. fought with a myriad of emotions, shock at seeing what his daughter should have looked like if she hadn’t died, anger at the girl’s audacity, and the tiny glimmer of hope that still refused to die. “I’m Trainee Auror H.J. Sebastian.”

“Of course you are.” Cammie had hoped that Harry had finally believed her. “Why did I even hope that I’d be believed?”

Harry placed the holder containing three vials of the potion on the table. “I’m actually going to give you the chance to prove you are who you say you are.” He nodded towards the potions. “They all contain the paternity potion. I will place my blood and yours in one; just yours in another; and Trainee Sebastian’s and your blood in the final one.”

“What will the results be?” Cammie asked.

“If you’re related to me by adoption, the potion will turn yellow, and if Trainee Sebastian is your father, as you claim, the potion will turn deep blue to indicate that you’re his adoptive daughter.” Harry pulled out several packets containing long needles out of his cloak. “The tube with just your blood will be the control.”

“And if I’m lying?” Cammie was half-afraid that it wouldn’t work.

“The potion will turn red.” Harry pricked his finger and dripped several drops of blood into the first vial while H.J. did the same to the last one. He then took out his wand. “Trainee Sebastian will prick your finger, and you will then deposit several drops of blood into each vial. If you make a wrong move, I promise you that I won’t be giving you a second chance, and you’ll be making a trip to Azkaban, and you can take your chances there.”

H.J. unwrapped the sterile needle, as Harry dropped the wards. “I want your middle finger.”

Cammie steeled herself for the prick of the needle. “Ouch.”

“The vials.” H.J. pushed them forward as Harry re-erected the wards.

Cammie squeezed her finger and deposited the requisite amount into each receptacle.

As Harry waited, he remembered doing the same thing with his world’s Severus. And as with Severus and himself, the potion

containing H.J. and Cammie's blood turned deep blue at the same time as the potion in the first vial turned yellow.

H.J. sat stunned. "Harry?"

"The potion can't be fooled, and she obviously hasn't been able to tamper with it." Harry met his niece's eyes. "Cammie, I'm so sorry." With a shaking wand, he dropped the wards and watched as H.J. pulled his daughter into his arms.

Cammie started to cry as she realized that the worst was over. H.J. too couldn't stop his own tears as he held the daughter he thought he'd lost forever. "We've missed you so much."

"I missed you too, Dad." Used to stemming her tears after a year of practice, Cammie quickly recovered before turning to Harry. "I really thought you'd believe me."

Harry could hear the accusatory resentment in her voice. "I had to do my job, Cammie. If you hadn't been who you said you were, and I'd simply accepted your word, it could have been disastrous."

Cammie knew Harry was right but she couldn't hide her distress that he hadn't trusted her. "How's Hugh?"

Harry suddenly realized why Dominus had tried to kill Harry Potter. "I'll go check on him."

"Harry, he's still a Death Eater." H.J. protested.

"Dad, he's my friend." Cammie stepped away from H.J. "If it wasn't for him, I'd still be in Castrum House."

Harry hesitated at the door at the mention of Castrum House. "I'm going to have to ask you a lot more questions at some point about what you went through, Cammie."

"And I'll answer them." Cammie's response was terse. "But right now I want to see Hugh, and I'd like my wands back."

After passing Cammie her wands, Harry led them out of the room, and H.J. reminded him of something. "I think you can drop the lockdown, Harry."

Harry tapped his ring three times with his wand, and a different alarm blared, permanently ending the lockdown. "Thanks." He then unlocked the cell and dismissed the Auror inside.

Cammie pulled free of H.J.'s grasp as she spotted Harry lying on the transfigured bed, the Dark Mark on his arm a vivid red. "I can't believe it was Harry Potter who helped me." Taking his hand, she gently stroked his still sweaty hair away from his face. "Harry?"

"I'm not sure he'll wake yet." Harry warned her. "He was given a sedative."

Sirius chose that moment to walk in. "I was just informed that you had two Death Eaters you were interviewing."

Harry nodded towards Harry Potter and his niece, who swung round at the sound of Sirius' voice. "It's not quite as clear cut as it seems."

Sirius gaped at Cammie. "Cammie?"

Cammie nodded. "Hello, Sir."

Sirius' gaze then fell upon his godson. "Dammit."

Cammie immediately leapt to defend Harry. "He hasn't done anything wrong. He didn't want to become fully apprenticed to his mother or to kill anyone, which is why he came here. And if it wasn't for him, I'd still be at Castrum House."

"Harry's mother is a Death Eater?" Sirius wanted to make sure he'd understood correctly what Cammie had just appeared to intimate.

"Yes." Cammie confirmed. "I also think she's the one who attacked Uncle Harry. Hugh, I mean Harry, said that her Animagus is a snake."

Cammie bit her lip. "He also said that she killed her sister." It was then that it registered with Cammie exactly what Harry's confession meant to her. "Oh Merlin. His mother killed my birth parents."

Harry realized then why Harry Potter had been so afraid. If Lily was capable of killing her sister, then it wasn't unreasonable to assume that she'd do the same to her son. "No wonder Harry was so frightened about Azkaban."

"Uncle Harry, what's going to happen to him?" Cammie asked in a tremulous voice, forgetting about her animosity towards her Uncle in her fear for her friend. "She'll go after him if he goes to Azkaban."

"That's up to Commander Black." Harry had no jurisdiction in that area unless Sirius gave it to him.

Sirius stared down at his sleeping godson. "Cammie, I need to know everything you do about Harry and his activities." When Sirius had finally exhausted everything he could think of asking, he got to his feet. "Harry, if you could deal with the paperwork, I'll deal with Lily's arrest."

"Commander Black, what will happen to Harry?" Cammie had sat on the edge of the bed holding Harry's hand as Sirius had questioned her.

Sirius debated what Cammie had just told him. "Given that his major crime is the use of the Unforgivables and being part of an unauthorized group, I should be dragging him before a hearing." Sirius hesitated as Cammie's face fell. "But due to extenuating circumstances, I'm not going to press formal charges if Harry will agree to submit himself to six months' voluntary house arrest."

Cammie's face lit up. "Thank you. I know he'll do that."

H.J.'s face, however, showed his disgust. "Six months' house arrest? It's hardly a punishment since he can't go out anyway."

Sirius beat Harry to the punch to reprimand H.J. "Sebastian, the last time I checked, I'm sure the door to my office read 'Commander Black, Head Auror', and not 'H.J. Sebastian'. When it does, you can feel free to mete out whatever punishment you deem fit. In the meantime, I suggest you keep your opinions about my decisions to yourself. Am I clear?"

H.J. gritted his teeth. "Yes, Sir."

"Now I suggest you take your daughter home, and when you report for duty on Monday, you can take yourself to Auror Vanguard, who I have no doubt will find you enough cleaning jobs to last you for the week." Sirius turned his back on H.J.

Cammie hadn't dared to say anything while Sirius was dressing her father down but now knew she had to say something. "I can't go home."

Unaware of her ring, Sirius asked the logical question. "Why not?"

Cammie held up her hand. "Even though I don't have the Dark Mark, Dominus can still summon me via this, and it's a sort of Dark Mark. Worse, I can't remove it, only he can."

Sirius knew quite a lot about the Dark Mark and its vagaries from Harry. "Wouldn't you have to freely accept the ring?"

Cammie blushed. "Yes. It was given to me by him as a gift. One day I stupidly decided to try it on while I thought he wasn't there." Cammie sighed. "He knew the moment I tried it on and told me what I'd done. If I'd known what it meant, I wouldn't have made the mistake of letting vanity dictate my actions."

All three men noticed that Cammie now commanded a considerably more articulate speech pattern than she had done when she'd been taken, as Sirius pondered Cammie's options. "You could take her to James' house."

H.J. immediately shook his head. "I don't want her anywhere near that Death Eater."

Cammie turned on her father. "Dad, Harry is my friend, and I'm not giving him up."

"Cammie, is there something we should know?" Harry asked gently, wondering if there was more going on between the two cousins than just friendship.

Cammie scowled at Harry, her earlier animosity resurfacing. "You think I'm sleeping with Harry now as well as Dominus?"

H.J. turned on Harry. "What is she talking about?"

Harry told him what he'd asked Cammie. "You can't blame me for jumping to the wrong conclusion."

H.J. had to admit he couldn't under the circumstances, and he asked Cammie bluntly what Harry had couched more diplomatically. "Well, are you sleeping with Harry?"

"No!" Cammie almost shouted the answer at her father. "Dominus threatened to kill him if he laid a finger on me, something he's proven he meant today."

"So he did try and touch you?" H.J. pressed.

Cammie resisted the urge to grab her father's own wand and ram it up his nose. Instead she said every word slowly as if she was talking to an idiot as she answered his question. "Dad, Harry is just a friend. No kissing, no touching, no sex."

Harry had the feeling that Cammie was going to blow. "We believe you."

"Bully for you." Cammie couldn't help herself, and she turned her back on her father and Uncle, and addressed Sirius. "Commander Black, I'd like to stay with Harry."

Sirius pointed to the door. "Harry, H.J. I believe Cammie will be perfectly safe in here for the time being."

H.J. wanted to argue but seeing the stubborn look on Cammie's face, he backed off, knowing he'd already upset his daughter enough with his unfounded accusation. "I'll be back in an hour to collect you."

"Thank you." Then turning her back on all of them, Cammie returned to her perch on the edge of Harry's bed, and held his hand.

Once outside the room H.J. turned to Harry. "Was she telling the truth?"

Harry nodded. "And given the shit we've put her through already, I think we should both cut her some slack."

Sirius agreed. "H.J., I suggest you warn Hermione what's happened, so that it's not quite so much of a shock when you turn up with Cammie." He turned to Harry as H.J. left. "I've changed my mind about the paperwork. You can come with me to arrest Lily."

Harry happily left with Sirius and the two men vanished together to head off to Hogwarts.

Next Chapter: Harry questions Lily

Thanks to everyone for their good wishes and PMs while I've recovered from surgery. Updates should now resume their original weekly posting as from today, if not sooner, until my next surgery in January or February. I have pretty much written all of the chapters now, so it should move quite quickly.

Chapter 50: Addiction

30th October 2005

Late afternoon

Sirius found Harry in his office. "I need you to take over questioning Lily."

As Sirius had been the one to make the actual arrest of an extremely outraged Lily, Harry questioned his request. "Why?"

"She won't talk to me." Sirius had tried several times before becoming frustrated and giving in. "So I'm handing her over to you. I've charged her already, so she's all yours."

"I'll do my best." Harry began to head in the directions of the cells before changing his mind about going directly there. Thirty minutes later he addressed the man whom he'd had accompany him. "Wait here. I'll let you know when I need you." He then finally entered Lily's cell. After dismissing the guard inside, he sat down, and gave her his usual spiel about who he was, before beginning to converse. "I understand you won't talk to Commander Black."

"I'd prefer to talk to you." Lily said smoothly.

"Commander Black has outlined the charges to you already, so I won't go over them again." Harry leant forward. "But I do know that you're guilty of every single one of them, Professor Snape, and I also know that it was you who tortured me that night in Castrum House."

"I have no idea what you're talking about." Lily had already decided to follow Regulus' previous example and admit to nothing.

Harry gave a smile. "My niece, Cammie, has confirmed your identity as a Death Eater."

Believing Cammie to be safely inside Castrum House, Lily wasn't buying it. "Your niece is dead, Sebastian. I attended her memorial."

“Actually she isn’t.” Harry’s smile grew wider. “Your son helped her to escape from Castrum House. Sadly your master wasn’t exactly impressed with his endeavor, and killed him for it.”

Lily laughed. “I have no idea what master you’re talking about, and Harry is safe at University.”

“You have no idea how wrong you are.” Harry got to his feet. “When Dominus discovered Cammie was missing, he used Harry’s Dark Mark to kill him when he couldn’t reach him any other way.”

Lily looked faintly bored as she responded. “You really expect me to believe my son is dead?”

“I’ll take you to him.” Harry dropped the invisible wall that separated him from Lily. After putting his wand to her head, he grabbed her arm. “Try anything, and I won’t hesitate to end your miserable life.” Harry knew that she couldn’t know he was lying; the most he could do was stun her unless she used lethal force against him first.

Even though she wasn’t frightened, Lily still shivered at the threatening tone in Harry’s voice. “Why would I try anything, Sebastian? I’ve done nothing wrong.”

“Let’s see shall we?” Harry then apparated them both into Harry’s cell, where he released Lily. “Look under the sheet.”

Lily lifted the sheet, and promptly dismissed what she saw. “You could have polyjuiced someone.”

“We’re hardly in the business of killing people just to gain a confession.” Harry remarked sarcastically. “I suggest you take a look at his left arm.”

Lily pulled the sheet further back, her heart sinking at the sight of the livid red Dark Mark. “It still doesn’t prove that I’m a Death Eater just because my son was one.”

Harry took her arm again. "Back to your cell."

Lily wasn't given a chance to protest as Harry apparated them back. Faced with what she'd just seen, tears began to run freely down Lily's face. After what Thomas had done to Draco Malfoy, she knew that he wouldn't have hesitated to do the same to her son if, as Harry Sebastian claimed, he'd helped Cammie escape.

Harry could feel genuine grief coming from Lily. "I'm sorry for your loss."

"Don't fucking lie to me." Lily screamed at Harry. "You're not sorry at all."

"I'm sorry when anyone who tries to do the right thing is unjustly punished." Harry responded. "Tell me, Professor. Did you show this much regret when you killed your sister?"

"I didn't kill Petunia." Lily snapped at Harry.

"That's not what your son told Cammie." Harry was aware that Lily was lying, and beginning to become severely stressed. "He was afraid that you'd come after him."

"I'd never kill my son." Lily's response was vehement and immediate.

"I don't believe you." Harry contended, even though he'd detected truth in her voice. He smiled again. "Just think, Professor. If you'd killed me that night, none of this would have happened. I wouldn't have been able to bring down the wards at the British Museum, you wouldn't have been hurt, and your son would never have met my niece. He'd have still been your apprentice right now, and, most significantly, he'd still be alive."

Lily struggled to contain the anger that was now building in her. "I've never had the opportunity to kill you."

"That's so true." Harry grinned. "Your master wouldn't let you, would he, Professor?"

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Lily took a deep breath as she made a concerted effort to control her anger.

Harry continued pressing her. “How did it feel, Professor, that despite doing your duty, you were still punished, and quite severely I believe, for letting a fourteen year old girl best you?”

Lily’s face turned ugly for a split second. “I really have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Harry decided that he’d never want Cammie anywhere near Lily; the hatred he’d felt on mentioning the incident had been almost overwhelming. “You hate Cammie, don’t you?”

“As she’s dead, I don’t care for her one way or the other.” Lily was now trying her hardest to ignore Harry’s heckling.

Harry had spoken briefly to Cammie again before she had left with H.J. to go to Sirius’ house. “I bet it’s been an interesting experience for you to have to put up with your master treating her like a princess while he tortured you for being a failure.”

“I am not a failure.” Lily snarled, knowing she was anything but.

“As far as Dominus is likely concerned, you are. Your son betrayed him in the worst possible way. I’m surprised that as well as killing Harry, he didn’t come after you as well.” Harry smiled a sweet smile. “And did I tell you about Severus?”

Lily became even tenser. “What about him?”

“He’s divorcing you, Lily.” Harry reverted to using Lily’s first name, aware it would irk her more. “And he’s petitioning the Wizengamot to deny you access to your children.”

Lily shook her head. “Severus would never do that.”

Harry reached into his pocket and placed a stamped petition on the table. "You were saying?"

Lily's tears began afresh. "He can't take my babies away from me."

Aware that Lily was now off balance, Harry pressed home his advantage. "You've lost everything, Lily; your husband, your children, and your freedom." He smirked widely. "And I almost forgot, Severus told me to let you know that he's carrying out the Abrogo Progenitor ritual when he remarries, something your eldest daughter has already requested of James. I'm quite sure Harry would have done the same, if his cold, traitorous and very dead body wasn't lying in a cell next door."

"How dare you talk about Harry like that." Lily screamed at Harry.

Harry laughed mockingly, aware that Lily was now near breaking point. "You really should have killed me when you had the chance, Lily. If you had, your son wouldn't be your little poor, dead, baby Harry."

On hearing Harry belittling her son, in her grief and anger, Lily lost all control, and lunged at Harry, instinctively changing into her Animagus form. Anticipating her reaction, Harry had deliberately failed to reinstitute the wards when he'd apparated Lily back into the cell.

Harry simply stood there and let her bite him, feeling the venom enter his bloodstream, before aiming his wand at her, and incapacitating her. Harry then opened the door to admit the man he'd asked to accompany him earlier. "Healer Bronson, I need you to testify how much venom she's injected into me."

The Healer ran his wand over Harry. "Enough to kill several men, Sir. I suggest you take an anti-venin potion."

After dismissing the Healer, Harry reached into his pocket, and pulled out a vial of anti-venin before returning Lily to her human state. "Lily Rose Evans-Snape, you are under arrest for attempted murder."

Knowing she'd given herself away, Lily scowled at Harry. "You're right. I should have killed you the first time around. Then there would have been no attempted about it."

Harry continued. "You are also under arrest for the murders of Petunia and Vernon Dursley, and Aditi Nessa. You will therefore remain here until your trial."

Lily gave Harry a malicious look. "It doesn't matter what you do to me, Sebastian. Dominus will eventually kill you, and I, for one, hope he does it slowly and painfully."

"You mean as he did with your son?" Harry knew it was a cheap shot but the look on Lily's face revealed the fact that it had hit home. "Now if you'll excuse me I have your trial to arrange."

Aware that this would be the only chance she'd get, Lily hit back. "Has your precious niece told you about her training, Sebastian?"

Normally he'd have ignored Lily but given Cammie's own admission about using the Imperius curse, Harry hesitated. "Nice try, Lily, but no cigar."

Lily knew that despite Harry's ostensible nonchalance, she'd gotten to him as he'd actually stopped to listen to her, and now she pressed home her own advantage. "Tell me, Sebastian, what was your biggest fear for your niece?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about." Unable to remember much about the night Lily was referring to, Harry really didn't.

Lily smirked as she filled Harry in. "I do believe it was that she didn't follow you down the same path when it comes to using the Dark Arts."

Harry was frustrated as to how Lily knew about his own former addiction; it certainly wasn't something he'd have discussed with his niece. "You don't know what you're talking about."

Lily just laughed. "I think you'll find I do. Ask Cammie. You'll discover that your niece probably knows more Dark Art spells than you do, Sebastian." Lily leant back in her chair, a self-satisfied look on her face. "Have a nice day." Only once the door had shut did Lily's face crumple into grief, as she began to weep as she thought about what had befallen her eldest son.

After making the necessary arrangements for the trial, Harry stormed up the corridor to Sirius' office. Once inside he let out an exclamation. "Fucking bitch."

Sirius sighed. "I see you didn't get anywhere either, did you?"

"I've arrested her formally, and her trial is being held at tonight's Wizengamot session." Harry contradicted Sirius' incorrect assumption. "But she's claiming that Cammie is neck-deep in the Dark Arts."

"She's just trying to get a rise from you." Sirius said confidently.

"I didn't sense any duplicity from her, Sirius." Harry wanted to punch something. "So I need to see Cammie."

"She's at James' house." Sirius informed him.

"I thought she was going to your place." Harry was confused by the change in destination.

"Hermione was with Tonks when H.J. told her about Cammie, and Tonks insisted that they go to her and James' house. The wards there are older than the ones on my home, and Hermione overruled H.J. when Tonks explained this." The force the once timid girl had apparently exerted had surprised Sirius. "She was adamant that Cammie's safety had to come before H.J.'s aversion to my godson."

"And H.J. caved?" Harry couldn't believe it. He knew how stubborn H.J. could be.

“Hermione also threatened to walk out on him, if he didn’t put Cammie first.” Sirius had spoken to Tonks via a firecall, and she’d told him about the change of plans.

“Then I’ll be at James’ place. Healer Bronson should have revived Harry by now, so he’s all yours to deal with.” Harry had arranged with the healer to administer the Draught of Living Death to the young man in order to fake his death.

“James is waiting to see him, so I’ll go collect him now.” Sirius placed a hand on Harry’s shoulder. “Lily might still be lying, Harry.”

Harry wasn’t convinced. “I’ll soon find out. I’ll see you later.” With that, the two men parted ways, Sirius going first to collect James before heading to his godson’s cell, and Harry heading for Grimmauld Square.

In his cell, Harry Potter swallowed hard as the door opened to reveal both his Dad and Godfather. He was more than a little sheepish with his greetings. “Hi Dad, Uncle Sirius.”

James strode over to Harry and pulled him into his arms. “Harry.”

Harry could feel James shaking as he was hugged. “I’m okay, Dad.” When James released him, Harry turned to Sirius. “I’m sorry I caused so much trouble, Uncle Sirius. What’s going to happen to me now?”

Sirius determined that his godson was genuinely regretful. “While I’ll admit you’ve been stupid in using the Unforgivables, and joining Dominus, because of what you’ve done for Cammie, I won’t be bringing formal charges against you. But I am going to place you under voluntary house arrest for the next six months. And I’d like you to remain at Grimmauld Square.”

“I can hardly return to Snape Manor.” Harry had a feeling that Severus would wash his hands of him.

James had already spoken to Severus. “Harry, Severus said that you’re always welcome at Snape Manor. In fact he’s waiting to speak

to you at Grimmauld Square. He knows all about Dominus and your mother.”

Sirius gave Harry a compassionate smile as Harry’s dismay at the knowledge that he was going to be grilled by Severus made itself apparent. “It’s thanks to you that we now have your mother in custody, and Cammie is back with her parents, so don’t be too hard on yourself.”

“It’s hard not to be.” Harry replied a little glumly. “I was a complete idiot.”

“I’m not going to argue with that.” Sirius ruffled Harry’s hair. “Now go with James.”

Harry followed James to an apparition point and immediately apparated home. He was met by Severus. “Father.”

“Hello, Harry.” Severus glanced at James, who’d just apparated in. James simply nodded in the direction of his study. His own talk with Harry could wait, as he knew that Severus wanted to get back to Harry’s younger siblings.

Harry followed Severus into James’ study and stood in front of his stepfather. “I’m really sorry, Sir.”

“Harry, I should have seen what was going on.” Severus blamed himself to a large extent. “I had no idea that your mother had dragged you into anything like this.”

“She didn’t.” Harry admitted. “It was one of my school friends who started it.”

“It doesn’t take a genius to guess who.” Severus knew it had to have been his godson but he could do little against someone who was already dead. “But I still should have noticed.”

Harry didn't want to talk about Draco, and asked about a matter that meant more to him than his former friend. "Dad said that I'm still welcome at Snape Manor; is he right?"

"Harry, even though James is your birth father, I've always considered you my son, and despite your mother's actions, I still do." Severus placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. "I am disappointed by what you've done but I'm also proud that you did the right thing when faced with a tough decision. Because of that you'll always be welcome at Snape Manor."

"What about Mum?" Harry felt guilty about Lily.

"I'm divorcing her, Harry." Severus' voice was heavy with regret and anguish. "Under the circumstances I can do little else. I have to protect your brother and sister."

"I understand." Harry wasn't entirely taken aback by what Severus was telling him.

Severus hadn't finished. "I'm also petitioning the Wizengamot to prevent Lily from having any access to them whatsoever. Eventually, if I should ever remarry, I will enact the Abrogo Progenitor ritual so that nothing of Lily remains in my children."

Harry's face reflected his dismay. "That's quite a radical step to take."

"Harry, I know you love your Mother but she killed her own sister, and expected you to take a Muggle life just to prove you could." Severus had been disgusted and dismayed when James had told him the truth. "And I can't have anyone around my children who is that immoral."

Harry could see Severus' feelings reflected on his face. "I could never have done it, Father."

"I know that and that's another reason why you are still welcome in my home." Severus pulled Harry to him and kissed him on the forehead. "I love you, Harry."

Harry felt tears come to eyes as Severus rarely spoke those words, and after what he'd done, they meant more than ever to him. "And I love you too, Father."

Severus released him. "I need to get back, Harry. The children, as you can guess, are pretty upset. I'd stay in here if I were you. I believe James wishes to speak to you as well."

Harry waited nervously for James to come in. He spoke first. "I'm sorry that I've disappointed you, Dad."

"I won't say that you haven't because you have." James closed the door behind him. "But I'm more disappointed and disgusted that your mother did nothing to extract you from this mess. As your mother Lily should have done everything she could to protect you."

"I didn't want protecting. I was delighted to be Mum's apprentice." Harry couldn't deny that he'd initially reveled in his position. "And I have no doubt that if I hadn't met Mie, nothing would have changed my outlook."

"Then I owe Cammie a debt of gratitude." James took his son's hand. "Harry, I know you think it's your own fault that you got into this but if I'd been a better father, you might have felt able to come to me."

Harry knew it wasn't true. "Dad, I don't want to hurt your feelings but Professor Snape has been a good father to me, and I still didn't feel the need to confide in him. It wouldn't have made any difference to me no matter how good our relationship was."

James had to accept Harry's words. "Okay, so no matter what I did it wouldn't have changed things, but while you were growing up I didn't do enough to get closer to you. And when you began to display your dislike for me, I didn't try as hard as I should have to set things right."

Harry wasn't willing to let James take all of the blame. "Neither did I, Dad. I let Mum's hatred of you color my opinion of you, when I should have listened to your side of the story as well as hers."

James was also cognizant of the fact that Severus probably had had something to do with it, but he wasn't about to alienate Harry now by saying so. "Harry, would you have listened if I had tried to tell you?"

"No." Harry shook his head. "I believed the rumors that you'd had an affair, and I took Mum's side."

"I didn't have an affair." James wanted Harry to know at least that much.

"Then what happened?" Harry was now open to listening to James' side of the story.

James shifted uncomfortably. "I'm not sure if I'm ready to tell you yet."

Harry could see that James was feeling ill at ease. "Why not? It can't be any worse than anything I've done."

"It is." James still wasn't sure if he could tell Harry. "And I'm afraid that what little ground we've made in trying to make a connection will be lost when I tell you."

"Dad, I held men under the Cruciatus for practice; now tell me what you did was worse." Harry admitted to James. "Because if you can't open up to me and be honest, then we may as well go back to the relationship we had."

James blinked away the tears that were threatening. "I want more than anything to try to have a fresh start with you, Harry, especially given what's happened to your mother."

"Dad, if that's what you want, then please trust me." Harry had had enough of lying and sneaking around. "But if you can't trust me now, then I don't think you ever will."

"You're right." James let go of Harry's hand and headed over to the drinks tray.

Harry couldn't miss how much James' hands were shaking as he slopped scotch into two glasses. "Dad, I don't really drink, and when I do, it's usually wine, or if I'm feeling really awful, a brandy."

James realized how little he really knew about his son as he poured out a brandy for him, before thrusting it towards Harry. "Take it. You're going to need it."

Harry wondered what terrible secret James was keeping that he'd need alcohol, especially given what he'd just told James. "Dad, despite what you've just said, it really can't be any worse than what I've just told you."

James took a large mouthful of the scotch. "Your mother left me because I was in love with someone else."

As Harry had already mentioned, he'd heard plenty of rumors to that effect, but James had denied having an affair. "So if you didn't have an affair then why did you give custody of Katherine and me to Mum? You were the pureblood; you could have kept us."

"I gave up custody of you and Katherine because your mother threatened to reveal the truth if I didn't." James put down his glass.

"Dad, it's hardly a crime to be in love with someone else." Harry protested, even as he guessed there must be to it than appeared.

James took a very deep breath, and shared with Harry what he'd told Katherine before she'd married Orion. "I was in love with Sirius."

Harry didn't know what he'd expected to hear but it certainly hadn't been that. "Did you and he...?"

"No!" James immediately rebutted Harry's assumption. "It was completely one-sided, and it's also now long in the past."

"Does Tonks know?" Harry wondered if James had been as honest with his new wife as he was now being with him.

"Yes, and she wasn't the slightest bit bothered when I told her." James couldn't help but smile as he thought about when he'd told his wife. "She told me she didn't care that I'd had a 'man-crush' on Sirius, and that she still loved me."

"So you're happy with her?" Harry liked Tonks despite the fact that she'd married James.

James' face softened. "I'd do anything for her, Harry. I admit she's an unlikely choice to make me happy but she does beyond compare."

Harry couldn't hide his relief. While he was glad that James had told him the truth, he'd also found it disturbing. "I'm glad she does, Dad." He put down his untouched brandy and hugged James. "And I'm glad you've told me the truth. It's helped knowing that you didn't just give us up because you didn't want us."

"Never think that. I never wanted to let you two go but I wasn't willing to expose you or myself to the censure we'd have both received." James was being totally honest with Harry now.

"Dad, I think this is something we can both put behind us now that it's out in the open between us. And obviously I won't ever mention this to anyone, not even Father." Harry knew that despite his love for Harry, Severus had very little time for James and he probably wouldn't have hesitated to use the information against him if he thought it would benefit him.

"Katherine knows, so you can discuss it with her if you want to." James found himself in tears as Harry let go. "So do you think you still want to try and build some sort of relationship with me? I know you'll never be as close to me as you are to Severus, but I also know that he cares deeply for you, and I'm grateful to him for that."

Harry couldn't deny that while he would always consider Severus his father, this was his chance to reconnect with James. "I'd like to try as well. Perhaps we should start by just talking first. We usually barely say anything that isn't me being rude or you shouting at me."

James pulled out the chair from behind the desk and put it next to the one in front so that he could sit down by Harry. "Let's start with something simple. I'd like to hear about how University is going."

Something suddenly struck Harry at the mention of the University. "I can't go back, Dad. Dominus believes he's killed me."

James thought for a few moments. "I'll speak to Severus about it. He's more than qualified to continue your University level education in potions, just as I can with your history. When everything blows over, we'll present your schoolwork and test results to the University and get them accredited."

Harry felt relieved after all the hard work he'd put in so far. "Thanks, Dad."

"It's the least I can do." James smiled at Harry. "Even if it does mean I have to talk to Severus."

Harry grinned back and he began to tell James about what he'd done so far at the University.

BritAd

As Sirius had headed off to find James, Harry had headed for Grimmauld Square. He'd soon found Cammie curled up against Hermione. "Hi."

Cammie's face lit up as she hoped for news about Harry. "Is Harry okay?"

"He's going to be arriving here shortly." Harry didn't know exactly how long it would be before Sirius released Harry.

H.J. scowled at his wife at the mention of Harry. "Do we really have to stay here, Hermione?"

“Yes.” It was Harry who answered, rather than Hermione. “You need to put aside your feelings, H.J. Cammie’s safety is the most important consideration right now.”

H.J. knew what Harry was saying was true but it didn’t make him like Harry Potter any better. “I know that, but I’d just prefer it if my daughter was nowhere near him.”

“Dad!” Cammie again went on the defensive for Harry. “Harry’s my friend, and he’ll always be my friend.”

“A Death Eater as a friend?” H.J. shook his head. “You’ve got no idea what someone like him is capable of.”

Cammie got to her feet. “I’ve got every idea, Dad. Just in case you’ve forgotten, I’ve just spent almost a year living amongst Death Eaters.”

H.J. hadn’t forgotten. “Then you should understand why I don’t want you anywhere near Potter.”

“Dad, Harry was only in a position to help me because he’s not like the other Death Eaters.” Cammie was now quivering with anger as she argued with her father. “If he’d been the killer you’re making him out to be, then I’d still be at Castrum House, and you’d have no bloody idea that I was still alive.”

Having had to listen to the two of them bickering about Harry ever since they’d arrived home, Hermione decided she’d heard enough, and stood between the pair. “This is supposed to be a happy time; something the two of you appear to have forgotten.” She turned to her daughter. “Cammie, I can understand why you want to defend Harry but there’s a lot you don’t know about your Dad’s past as to why he feels the way he does.” She then turned on H.J. “And I can understand why you want to protect Cammie, but she’s right. Harry isn’t a killer, and if it wasn’t for him, we still be laboring under the mistaken belief that our daughter was dead.”

Under the weight of his wife’s angry stare, H.J. held out his arms to Cammie. “I’m sorry.”

“So am I.” Cammie hugged her father.

Harry knew that he was about to rock the boat again. “Cammie, I need to talk to you.”

“What about?” Cammie returned to sit by Hermione, her voice short as she was still angry with Harry about how he’d treated her.

“Exactly what you were taught during your captivity?” Harry knew that Lily had been telling the truth when he experienced a wash of fear and shame emanating from his niece.

Cammie thought she was going to be sick. “Who told you?”

“Lily Snape.” Harry could see that everyone was puzzled. “What spells can you do? And please don’t hide anything from me.”

H.J. turned to Harry. “What’s going on?”

Harry turned to him. “Lily informed me that Cammie probably knows more Dark Art spells than I do; something I personally doubt but I am sure that Cammie is cognizant with enough of them to make it a problem.”

H.J. paled and looked at his daughter. “Is it true?”

Cammie nodded, tears starting to spill down her cheeks. “I didn’t realize they were Dark Art spells until Harry told me. He found me practicing, and we started discussing the spells. It was only then that I found out.”

“And you couldn’t stop could you?” Harry’s voice was gentle. “Even when you didn’t have to use them.”

Her anger at Harry fading under his soft voice, Cammie shook her head. “I tried. I really did.”

“You didn’t try hard enough then.” H.J.’s hatred of anything dark surfaced yet again.

Harry turned on H.J. “Unless you’ve been there, you can’t understand, H.J.”

“I’ve used Dark Art spells myself, and I’ve never felt unable to stop.” H.J. pointed out.

“Doing the occasional spell is different from practicing hour after hour.” Harry ran an agitated hand through his hair. “It consumes you, H.J. Even now, if I use a spell such as the Cruciatus or the Imperius, I still have to struggle not to use them again and again. It’s a craving that never goes away.”

Cammie, who was being held by Hermione, looked up at her Uncle. “Why did you use them?”

“I was a Death Eater in my world, Cammie.” Harry could see the shock reverberating through his niece at his revelation. “But it wasn’t through choice.”

Cammie met Harry’s eyes. “Did you kill anyone?”

“Yes.” Harry wasn’t going to lie to his niece. “I had to execute a Death Eater. It was after that that my Dad realized that I had the same addiction you do.” Harry closed his eyes for a moment before re-establishing his connection with Cammie, and let out another secret shame he always carried with him. “And I discovered that I enjoyed the feeling that killing a man gave me, and I still do enjoy the feeling that using the Unforgivables gives, but I don’t enjoy using them on others.” Harry felt the need to quantify the difference.

“I like the feeling that using the Imperius curse gives me.” Finally feeling that could trust her Uncle, Cammie opened up as well. “But it’s not just that one; I like the feeling when I use any of the Dark Art spells.”

“Fucking son of a bitch.” H.J. turned and punched the wall, his hand impacting off the solid brick, sharp cracks signaling he’d just broken several bones.

Cammie was frightened by the violence her Dad was displaying. “I’m sorry, Dad.”

“It’s not your fault, baby.” Hermione held her daughter even closer.

H.J. turned, cradling his hand. “I’m not angry with you, Cammie.” H.J. swore again. “That fucker. He was trying to turn you.”

Harry agreed. “Addicted as she is, Cammie would eventually have done anything to be allowed to practice the Dark Arts, even joined him. I think only her age and inexperience has prevented him from attempting it so far.”

“I’d never have done that.” Cammie protested.

Harry knew how wrong she was. “Yes you would.” He held out his hand. “Cammie, I’m going to have to take your wands away, and you’re going to be okay at first, but then you’re going to find yourself begging me to give them back to you. You’re going to want them so badly that you’d give up your parents, me, or Harry to Dominus if it got you what you wanted.”

Cammie didn’t believe him. “I would never betray anyone here.”

“I’m so sorry, Cammie, but you would. I’d have done the same when I was going through this.” Harry beckoned to her. “I need your wands.”

Cammie immediately unholstered both wands. “You’re wrong, Uncle Harry.”

“I hope so.” Harry handed the wands to H.J. “Lock those up.” He then turned to everyone. “I also want your wands locked up as well. Cammie won’t hesitate to steal them.”

Everyone did as Harry demanded before Harry left the room to catch up with Severus before he left for Hogwarts. After arranging for his children to remain a little longer in the care of Madam Pomfrey, Severus had returned with Harry to fill James and Harry Potter in on what was happening. As a result, Harry Potter had also found himself divested of his wands as well.

Several hours later, Cammie appeared to be alright, and after sitting watching minute by minute crawl by, H.J. looked expectantly at Harry. "It looks as though you're wrong, Harry."

"No, I'm not." Harry could already sense Cammie's growing anxiety even though she wasn't showing it outwardly.

Cammie got up, a bright smile on her face. "Dad's right, Uncle Harry. I'm fine."

"Sit back down." Harry left the room and went next door to check on progress. "Cammie's starting to go into withdrawal."

"How long before I do?" Harry Potter wasn't looking forward to it.

"Your stress levels are already starting to become elevated." Harry warned him.

Harry Potter stared at Harry. "How can you tell?"

"Ward." Harry lied. "I'll be back later."

Little more than twenty or so minutes had gone by when Cammie snapped, and shot to her feet. "This is fucking stupid. Just give me my damn wands."

Harry raised a hand to warn H.J. and Hermione to say nothing. "No."

Cammie started pacing, her face reflecting her discomfort. "Dominus wouldn't have kept them from me."

"That's because he wanted to turn you." Harry pointed out.

“He was my friend.” Cammie snarled, as she began to scratch her arms. “Which is more than I can say about you.”

“We care about you, otherwise we wouldn’t be doing this, baby.” Hermione said gently.

“You don’t give a shit about me.” Cammie snapped at her mother. “I was just someone you had to put up with so that you could get your hands on Dad.”

H.J. started to get irritated with Cammie. “Apologize.”

“It’s true. She hates me. You all hate me.” Cammie screamed at him as she started shivering. “I’m going back.”

Harry had already taken the precaution of erecting wards to stop apparition and portkeying. “The house is warded, Cammie.”

“I fucking hate you.” Cammie tried to run past Harry towards the front door, only for her Uncle to loop an arm around her waist, lift her up and deposit her on the sofa between Hermione and H.J. “Cammie, I want you to take this sleeping potion.” Harry withdrew a vial from his pocket. “It will make things easier on you.”

“I don’t want a damn potion. I want my wands.” Cammie’s eyes fell on the cupboard she knew the wands were locked in. She turned to H.J. next to her, her angry tone now wheedling. “Dad, you know I’d never hurt anyone.”

H.J. shook his head. “You can’t have them.”

Cammie began to cry angrily. “I wish I’d never left.”

Harry heard a thud next door. “H.J., get her to take this.” After shoving the vial of potion in H.J.’s hand, he hurried next door where Severus and James, both of whom had relinquished their wands, were struggling to hold an enraged Harry.

Harry fished the other vial out of his pocket. "Let him go." As the young man surged forward, Harry threw the vial across the room as he caught hold of Harry Potter around the waist with one arm. "Catch."

Harry Potter lashed out as hard as he could, trying to free himself from Harry's unrelenting grip. He screamed in pain as bones in his hand snapped as he connected with Harry's face. With some of the fight momentarily knocked out of him, Harry forced the young man to the floor and Severus was able to administer the potion. Harry then picked the sleeping boy up, and laid him on a sofa. "It's better this way."

James lifted his son's swollen hand. "I need my wand to heal this." Being a teacher, basic first aid was a required part of the job, as sometimes the nurse wasn't always available.

Severus took the key to the cupboard and unlocked it, before withdrawing the wands inside. As James dealt with his son, Severus asked Harry a question. "James and I couldn't hold Harry, yet you managed with one arm. You're a werewolf, aren't you?"

Harry decided that after everything that had gone on, he'd be truthful. "Yes, I am."

Even though he didn't particularly like Harry, Severus' eyes lit up. "Would you consider letting me have some of your hairs and blood when you transform next?"

Harry should have guessed that Severus' main interest would be in potions, and not in finding out whether Harry was registered. "I'm willing to consider a trade."

Harry was now talking a language Severus liked. "What sort of trade?"

After a short conversation, Harry shook hands with Severus. "What kind of timeline are we looking at?"

“I’ll need at least a month.” Severus estimated. “And someone to test it on.”

“I’ll find you a guinea pig.” Harry promised. “I’d best go check on my niece.”

H.J. was cradling Cammie’s head on his lap when Harry entered. “We only just about managed to force her to take the potion. We should have just given it to her earlier, Harry.”

Harry had had good reason why he hadn’t suggested it before for both Harry Potter and Cammie. “Cammie and Harry had to go through that to understand how badly the Dark Arts affects a person. Without it they might be tempted to return to their practice.”

“There’s no guarantee that they still won’t though, is there?” Hermione asked in a worried voice.

Harry shook his head. “No, but after the way Cammie’s spoken to you, she’s going to be pretty upset and mortified at how she behaved, and it’s this alone that I believe will keep her on the straight and narrow. In contrast, Harry’s willingness to do whatever it takes to shed the stigma of being a Death Eater is going to be the driving force for him.”

“Is that how it was for you?” Tonks believed Harry to be speaking from experience.

“For me it was for the same reason as Cammie will have not to return to her practice; I nearly destroyed my Dad in the process of getting clean.” Harry pulled a face. “It certainly helped me to realize how much damage I could do.”

“So will Cammie be able to have her wands when she wakes up?” Hermione didn’t want to give them back, only for her daughter to have a relapse.

“Give it another 24 hours.” Harry suggested. “Harry is going to be going through the same, so she’ll have support from him.”

This time H.J. said nothing about the young man, as he'd had time to consider what could have become of his daughter if Harry hadn't risked his life to get her out. "I'm going to stay with Cammie until she wakes."

"So am I." Hermione sat down next to H.J.

Tonks headed for the door. "I'm going to check in with James."

Harry too had somewhere he needed to be. "I'm afraid I need to go. Lily's trial is being held in less than an hour, and I'm the Chief Prosecutor for BritAD."

Next Chapter: Lily's trial; Thomas receives an unwelcome visitor bearing a warning for him.

Chapter 51: An Unwelcome Visitor

30th October 2005

Remus, who'd been contacted by James, knocked on Xander's door at the Academy, smiling when Luna opened it. "Can I come in?"

"I've finished..." Luna stopped before she finished the sentence. "You're not here about work are you?"

Remus shook his head. "No. Is Xander in?"

"Did I hear my sweet name?" Xander came bounding out of the bathroom, a towel in his hand, which he threw to one side in order to shake Remus' hand.

"You did." After releasing Xander's hand, Remus' smile grew as he spotted a familiar face seated in the dining room. "Nicole, I didn't expect to see you here. I thought you were on vacation in Nice for the week."

"I changed my mind." Nicole got up and hugged her brother, before placing her hand on the arm of the young man who'd stood up with her. "You already know Neville, do you not?"

Remus shook hands with the nervous looking young man. "I do. How are you?"

"Fine thanks, Professor." Neville's voice was quivering with nerves.

"Seeing as you've left Hogwarts, I think you can now call me Remus." Remus responded. "And speaking of Hogwarts, I understand from James that you've been taken on as Pomona's assistant."

Neville's face became illuminated. "I finished top of my class in both advanced Magical Horticulture and Soil Science at the Magical Institute of Earth Sciences, and Headmaster Potter asked me to

come in and interview. Professor Sprout is leaving in five years' time, and I'll be taking over when she does."

"And how long have you been seeing Nicole?" Remus abruptly changed the subject, making it clear that he knew that Neville was obviously dating his sister.

Neville's nervousness returned. "Two weeks, Sir."

"Is that so?" Remus had to hide his smile as Neville timidly nodded his head. "Would you mind if I spoke to Nicole, Luna and Xander alone?"

Neville presumed it was something to do with the Watchers' Council, not having heard Luna's remark, and he was relieved to get away from Remus' scrutiny. "I'll head back to Hogwarts."

"I will walk you to the door." Nicole followed Neville out. When she returned, her pink lipstick was absent.

"He's certainly not the type of person I imagined would be your type." Remus had, of course, spotted the missing lipstick.

"Neville is very sweet." Nicole sat down.

Luna sighed dreamily. "I think they make a wonderful couple."

"You introduced them, didn't you?" Remus guessed.

Luna had. "I just knew that they'd be perfect for each other." She then changed the subject, her face losing its vague look. "So what can we do for you?"

Remus was only too delighted to tell her. "It's about Cammie."

Xander's face took on a look of confusion. "Cammie, as in our Cammie?"

“Yes.” Remus then removed Xander’s confused look with his next words. “She’s alive, and at James’ house in Grimmauld Square.”

Surprisingly, it was Xander who first burst into tears, startling everyone there. Luna leant her face against her husband’s back, and wrapped her arms around his stomach. “Is she alright?”

Remus realized that Luna was barely holding onto her own tears, as she chose to comfort her husband instead. “Not exactly.” He then told everyone what Cammie and Harry Potter were going through with the Dark Arts addiction, and what Harry had done to help his cousin.

“So Harry Potter is something of a hero.” Luna’s voice was filled with disbelief. “He was such a wanker at school.”

Amused by Luna’s atypical comment, Remus had to agree. “James said that Cammie is to thank for his change.”

“When can we see her?” Xander had by now regained control of his emotions but was still shaking.

“She’ll be asleep until the morning but come by for dinner tomorrow tonight.” Remus got up. “You too Nicole, but I’m afraid you’ll have to leave Neville behind. No-one else can know that Harry Potter is still alive.”

“I understand.” Nicole was a little disappointed, as she’d hoped to spend the evening with Neville. Even though they’d only been dating for two weeks, and Neville was younger than her, she was, as Luna had expected she would be, totally smitten by him and his gentle nature.

Luna got up and got another glass. “Do you want to stay for a drink?”

“I’d better not. Buffy will be wondering where I’ve gotten to, and I don’t really want to leave her alone with Emily, even in somewhere as busy as this place.” Remus’ and Buffy’s daughter, Emily Joyce, had been born on 1st September, and he was trying to spend as much time as he could with the two of them.

“I’ll go fetch them.” Xander offered. “It’s not as if the two of you live miles away.” He opened the door to head up the corridor to Remus’ apartment. “Be back shortly.”

Buffy had moved into Remus’ apartment at the Academy when she was five months’ pregnant, with Remus converting his second bedroom into a nursery for their daughter. “In that case, I’ll have a glass of wine.”

Grimmauld Square

Happening to pass by it as a knock sounded, Thomas opened the front door. “Sirius, this is a surprise.”

Mione came out into the hallway on hearing her husband mention Sirius’ name. “Come in.”

Sirius followed the couple into the sitting room. “I wasn’t sure whether you’d be here or not.”

“I had a breakfast meeting yesterday I had to attend, and a few things cropped up this morning that I also needed to deal with, meaning that we had to put off going to the Island this weekend.” Thomas moved over to the drinks cabinet. “Can I get you anything?”

“A neat firewhiskey, thank you.” Sirius took the glass after Thomas had poured out his drink.

“We were about to go into dinner.” Mione explained the delicious smells that were drifting into the sitting room. “Would you like to join us?”

Sirius’ stomach grumbled noisily at the suggestion of food. “I think that would be a yes.”

“Let’s go sit down then, and you can tell us whatever it is you came here to say.” Thomas followed Sirius and Mione into the dining room,

moving down to the end of the table, as Sirius pulled Mione's chair out for her.

Sirius took several mouthfuls of his tomato and basil soup before beginning. "I'm here about Cammie."

Mione's spoon stopped halfway to her mouth, and she began to shake. "You've found her body?"

Sirius could have kicked himself as Mione jumped to the wrong conclusion. "Exactly the opposite; she's safe."

Mione's spoon clattered noisily as it hit her bowl, tomato soup spraying everywhere. Mione just ignored it as her hand flew to her mouth, tears filling her eyes. "Oh thank Merlin."

Thomas, of course, was already aware of Cammie's return, and he got up, moving to comfort his wife. "Where is she?"

Mione let Thomas tug her off her chair and into his arms, and she cried with relief against his chest. Sirius stopped eating. "James' house as it's the most heavily warded."

Mione took several deep breaths as she tried to regain her composure, and she smiled up at Thomas. "I'm okay. It was just a bit of a shock."

Thomas stroked her hair from her eyes and kissed her lightly, before letting her go and returning to his seat. "So how did she escape?"

"This is confidential." Sirius warned. "As it's not going to become public knowledge that Cammie is safe, and the information pertaining to her rescuer most definitely won't be."

"I'm happy to swear an oath if you need it." Thomas offered, doubting that Sirius would.

Not wanting to insult Thomas, Sirius hesitated, before shaking his head. "Just your word will be sufficient." When Thomas and Mione

both gave their words, Sirius told them. "My godson, Harry, helped her to escape. Unfortunately the only reason he was able to do so is because he's a Death Eater."

Mione's hand once more flew to her mouth. "I'm sorry, Sirius."

"It's not as bad as it sounds." Sirius assured her. "He was told he had to make something called a first kill. When he discovered that he couldn't face doing it, he actually sought Harry Sebastian out on Cammie's advice, taking her with him."

"So Harry Potter helped Cammie escape?" Thomas inquired, even though he already knew the answer.

"Yes, they became friends during the time she spent as a prisoner." Sirius then explained in more detail how Cammie had met his godson, and what had ensued afterwards. "...and for his efforts in getting Cammie out, Dominus tried to kill him."

Thomas almost spat out his soup in surprise at Sirius' comment. "Tried?"

"Through Harry's Dark Mark." Sirius pushed his empty bowl away. "But luckily we were able to stop him."

"How?" Thomas pushed aside his own half-finished soup.

"I'm afraid that is classified." Sirius smiled apologetically. "And therefore I can't divulge how it was done."

"I can appreciate the need for some things to remain confidential." Thomas hid his annoyance, and tried to determine Harry's location. "So is Harry Potter staying at Potter Place as well?"

Sirius nodded as a plate appeared with steak & kidney pudding on it. Side dishes also appeared for him to choose the accompaniments. "He's actually under house arrest for six months' for his affiliation with the Death Eaters."

“So he won’t be sent to Azkaban?” Thomas helped himself to new potatoes and braised carrots.

“No, but while we’re discussing Azkaban, I may as well tell you about some news that will become public before you read about it tomorrow.” Sirius couldn’t see any reason to hide it. “We arrested Lily Snape for being a Death Eater this afternoon. And unlike my godson, she’s far from innocent.”

This time Thomas was unable to hide his shock as he choked on a piece of kidney. Mione immediately whipped out her wand and aimed a dislodging spell at her husband’s throat, causing the food to free itself. “Are you okay?”

Thomas took a mouthful of water. “Yes, I was just taken aback.”

“Not as taken aback as I was.” Sirius remarked, not realizing how wrong he was. “I’ve known Lily for years, and while I knew she could be a bit of a harridan, I didn’t realize how far she’d gone.”

Mione took a sip of her red wine. “Did Harry tell you about her?”

Sirius shook his head. “Not exactly. Cammie already knew that Harry was visiting his mother when she met him. It didn’t take a mastermind to figure out who Lily was once Cammie found out that ‘Hugh’ was Harry.”

Thomas wished he’d forced Cammie to swear an oath but knew that there was little he could do about it now. “So will Harry and Cammie both remain at Potter Place?”

Sirius nodded as he swallowed one of the tenderest pieces of steak he’d ever eaten. “It’s the safest place for them. Even Dominus would struggle to get through the wards.”

Thomas begged to differ but decided that Harry Potter could wait for the time being. He could deal with him once things had died down.

Mione's face was hopeful as she asked her next question. "Can we see Cammie?"

Sirius issued the same invitation to dinner that Remus had. "We're going to hold a little welcome home dinner tomorrow night at seven. We were going to have everyone around for lunch but right now Cammie's in pretty bad shape."

Mione's face took on a distressed look. "He tortured her?"

"No." Sirius put paid to Mione's belief. "But she's become addicted to the Dark Arts."

"Oh no." Mione remembered what Harry had gone through. "I take it you're making her go through withdrawal."

"Harry is." Sirius confirmed. "She'll be tired tomorrow but essentially okay as long as she refrains from using excessive Dark Art spells."

"Is Harry Potter affected the same way?" Mione asked after Sirius' godson.

"Yes." Sirius answered after finishing the last of his steak & kidney pudding. "But like Cammie, he'll be alright."

Even as he presented a bland face to Sirius and his wife, Thomas' mind was ticking over. "Would you prefer dessert or cheese?"

"Cheese, please." Sirius wasn't too fond of sweet things, preferring the savory delicacy instead.

Mione and Thomas both joined him in his choice and talked generally about Harry and Cammie. After finishing, Mione stood up. "If you'll both excuse me, I need to help Theresa bathe the children."

Thomas got to his feet. "Would you like a game of snooker?"

Sirius was in no rush to leave; Faith was in the States, and had taken the children with her to visit some of the friends she had in New York,

and he wasn't due at the Ministry for over an hour. "I think I might be persuaded."

"I'll just select some wine. Why don't you make your way to the billiards room?" Thomas went into his office before heading for the cellar and picking a bottle of red wine he knew Sirius liked, as well as one he himself favored. Tapping both bottles, he uncorked them, dropped several droplets of the clear tasteless potion he'd collected from his office into one bottle, and then apparated up to the billiards room. He nodded towards the table as he poured Sirius a glass of Merlot. "You can break first."

The two then discussed general matters as the game progressed until the subject of Dominus came up again. "So do you have any idea who he is?"

Sirius shook his head. "None whatsoever. I was hoping that Cammie or Harry could give us some idea, but sadly not."

"And Lily Snape doesn't know?" Thomas moved around the table to line up his next shot, not once betraying his concern.

"Before Harry questioned her, I tried Veritaserum and Legilimency on her to try to get information when she refused to talk to me. Nothing worked." Sirius sighed, not even once stopping to think why he'd tell Thomas something that was confidential. "She's obviously sworn an oath making it impossible to find out."

Thomas imperceptibly relaxed. "A pity."

"Tell me something I don't know." Sirius continued watching as Thomas sank ball after ball.

"When is her trial?" Thomas scowled as he missed the pocket he'd been aiming for.

Sirius took over at the table. "Tonight. The Wizengamot are already in session so it seemed a waste of time to delay."

“I would have thought you’d be officiating.” It was now Thomas’ turn to watch as Sirius too began to sink ball after ball.

“Harry is dealing with it. He’s the one who got a confession out of her.” Sirius gave a big grin. “He threw her off balance by showing her Harry’s ‘body’, and afterwards taunting her with how she should have killed him. Eventually she snapped, transformed and bit him.”

“She bit him?” Thomas quickly worked out how many points were left on the table as Sirius missed a shot.

“She’s a snake Animagus.” Sirius wasn’t surprised when Thomas decided to snooker him rather than potting a ball.

“Don’t tell me, Harry didn’t bother with the wards.” Thomas smiled as Sirius narrowly missed the yellow ball.

“You’re right, he didn’t.” Sirius had a feeling he was about to lose as Thomas fluidly began to sink balls once more. “It’s a technique he’s said he’s put to good use before.”

“Impressive.” Thomas remarked as he potted the penultimate ball. “For someone so young, Harry is quite accomplished. If I didn’t know better, I’d think he was far older than he is. I was astounded by the recording of his display at USAD.”

“Cassie mentioned you had seen it.” Sirius sighed as Thomas sank the black, and he held out his hand. “Good game.”

“Another?” Thomas asked, hoping to pump Sirius for more information about Harry and Lily.

Sirius was tempted but knew that he had business elsewhere he had to attend to. “I think I’ve encroached on your hospitality for long enough.”

“And you want to get back to the Ministry for the trial, don’t you?” Thomas correctly assumed.

The potion having stripped away his inhibitions, Sirius made a suggestion. "Yes but you're welcome to accompany me. I can authorize you to view the trial if you'd like."

Thomas had to hide his smirk at how easy it had been to garner the invitation. "I would like that."

The Ministry of Magic

After giving Thomas clearance, the two men made their way down to the courtroom where the trial was being held. Once inside, Thomas wasn't surprised to see Lucius and Regulus in the viewing gallery, their titles gaining them admittance. They were, however, surprised to see him in Sirius' company. Thomas also spotted Cassandra, her eyes red-rimmed, and a tight look adorning her face.

Sirius led the way over to where his daughter was sitting. "Have we missed much?"

Cassandra nodded. "It's actually advanced extremely quickly. She didn't bother denying attacking Harry, and said she hoped got another chance, before blustering that Azkaban would never hold her."

"I'd like to see her get out of Azkaban now that we've increased the security." Sirius boasted, the potion still in his system.

"You're not concerned about Dominus getting in?" Thomas asked in a hushed voice.

"No." Sirius had had the wards boosted almost tenfold. "And after her son has betrayed him, I can't see him going in to save her."

The trio fell silent as Lily was asked to stand as the Wizengamot came to a decision. Albus Dumbledore also stood up. "Do you have anything to say before we deliver a verdict?"

“Yes.” Lily still had her back to the viewing gallery. “I’m proud to say that I serve Dominus.”

“Even though your son has perished because of his affiliation with the same man?” Albus asked.

“Harry was a fool.” Lily turned slowly so that she could look at each member of the Wizengamot, and then the viewing gallery. “Just as you’re all fools if you think you can stop Dominus. He’s going to show you what it is be a great...” Lily’s voice died away as her eyes fell upon Thomas.

Albus decided that she’d said enough. “I believe we get your gist about how great Dominus is supposed to be.” His tone was somewhat mocking.

In the gallery, Cassandra whispered quietly to her Dad. “Do you think she saw you, and that’s why she stopped speaking?”

Sirius didn’t think Lily gave a hoot about him. “Something or someone else spooked her. I don’t think we need three guesses to work out who.”

Able to overhear the discourse between father and daughter, Thomas couldn’t resist in joining in with the pair in looking around. “Do you think he’s here?”

Cassandra shivered as she ran her eyes over everyone there. “He’s certainly got some nerve if he is.”

“You really think he’s that daring?” Thomas was quite enjoying toying with the Blacks.

“Yes.” Sirius rubbed the scar across his throat as he thought about how daring he knew Dominus to be. “I wouldn’t say that much frightens him, and certainly not walking into a supposedly closed session of the Wizengamot.”

Having talked through Albus' announcement, all three of them returned their attention to him just in time to see Lily being led away by Harry and two other Aurors. Thomas twisted around to where Regulus was sitting. "I'm sorry, Regulus, but I missed what was said."

Not quite able to catch what the three in front of him had been saying, Regulus had been listening to Albus' announcement. "Life in Azkaban."

"Thank you." Thomas got to his feet. "It looks as though Lily is in for a long stay."

"Good." Cassandra was vehement.

"You really hate her, don't you?" Thomas couldn't miss the vitriol in the young woman's voice.

"She tortured and almost killed Harry." Cassandra had been horrified when she found out that a woman she'd called aunt was the person who'd tortured her boyfriend. "And she left me alone with Starr."

"I can understand how upset you are about that." Thomas sympathized with her, but after Cassandra had nearly killed him, he no longer felt guilty about her treatment.

Having dispatched Lily to Azkaban, Harry walked out into the foyer to join them, and immediately detected how upset his girlfriend was. "I didn't expect that to go by so quickly."

Cassandra felt comforted when Harry squeezed her hand before letting it go. "Neither did I."

"Thanks for letting me join you, but I should get going. I have things that need seeing to." Thomas held out his hand to Sirius.

Sirius shook it. "I'll see you and Mione tomorrow night."

Harry also shook Thomas' hand, hiding his wince as the usual pain darted through him. "Thomas."

Cassandra found herself being hugged and given a kiss on the cheek. "It was nice to see you, Thomas. I just wish it had been under more pleasant circumstances."

Thomas let go of her. "Don't dwell too much on Lily Snape. I'm sure she's going to get everything she deserves."

"Thank you." Cassandra decided that Thomas was right. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight." Thomas walked off, aware of both Regulus and Lucius peeling away from the crowd and following him at a distance. When he reached the apparition point, he hesitated, allowing them enough time to reach him before he apparated out. "Castrum."

Thomas was waiting for the two men when they finally reached his rooms, and he got straight to the point. "We have some planning to do now that Lily has managed to get herself convicted."

"Who are you going to have get rid of her?" Lucius assumed that that was Thomas' intention.

"I'm not getting rid of Lily." Thomas poured out scotch for the two men. "I'm going to break her out."

"Do you have any idea how much money has been invested in upgrading Azkaban's warding?" Lucius had contacts in the Ministry, and had been shocked at how much had been spent.

"I do." Thomas also knew exactly what had been done through the contact he had at the Ministry. "And after the Minister's fortuitous comment, I think the wizarding world should witness exactly what I'm capable of."

Regulus believed he knew exactly what Thomas was planning. "You're not just breaking Lily out; you're going to destroy Azkaban, aren't you?"

Thomas confirmed Regulus' gut feeling. "I am, and at the same time hopefully decimate a great deal of BritAD's staff as well."

"When?" Lucius wondered how long they'd have to plan it.

"I think Lily deserves to cool her heels for a while." Thomas wasn't going to let her get off scot-free. "Especially in the light of her son's actions."

"Does she know he's dead?" Lucius had been outside smoking a cigar when he'd spotted Harry sitting Cammie down. At the time he'd thought nothing of it, but when it was discovered that Cammie was missing, it hadn't taken much guesswork to figure out who'd helped her to escape.

"He's not dead." Thomas' lips tightened. "Black told me that somehow he escaped that fate, but I have no idea how."

"Do you know where he is?" Lucius inquired. "He obviously isn't standing trial or he'd have been up there tonight."

"I do know." Thomas didn't enlighten Lucius or Regulus though as to where. "And I intend to deal with him myself."

"And your niece?" Regulus had grown to like the feisty young girl who, despite eventually submitting to Thomas' rules, had fought him every step of the way.

"She's in the same place." Thomas was looking forward to hearing what Cammie had to say about her confinement when he saw her the next day.

"Will you hand her over to Lily?" Lucius assumed correctly that it had been Cammie who'd betrayed the woman.

“Once she’s free, if Lily so much as breathes on my niece I’ll make her death an excruciating and drawn-out event.” Thomas still wasn’t willing to hurt Cammie. “And the same goes for anyone else.”

Lucius hurriedly returned to the subject of Azkaban. “So how long with Lily be cooling her heels for?”

Thomas told him. “So whatever plans you have for that night, you’ll have to cancel them.”

Both men knew that went without saying. “I think we’re going to need to get Rupert in to discuss the warding.”

“He’ll be taking point.” Thomas informed them. “I will sort out the necessary portkeys.”

“How many men?” Regulus had the feeling that the team would be large but even he wasn’t expecting the answer Thomas gave.

“All of them.” Thomas decided.

“All of them?” Lucius couldn’t help but echo Thomas’ words. “For one woman?”

“This isn’t about Lily.” Thomas didn’t want either man to think that it was. “It’s about showing everyone that I’m an unstoppable force, and that Azkaban is far from the immovable and impenetrable object everyone believes it to be.”

The three men then spent another hour discussing the finer points of the attack before disbanding.

Thomas apparated home to find Mione curled up in bed doing a crossword. She lifted her face so that he could kiss her cheek. “How did the trial go?”

“Life.” Thomas turned away from the bed to pull off his jacket, and then started to unbutton his shirt. “Hardly a surprise.”

“It certainly went on for a while.” Mione remarked as she continued with her task.

“It was actually over quite quickly but I bumped into Regulus and we got talking about the case.” Thomas shed his trousers and socks and walked into the bathroom in just his boxer shorts. “I didn’t think you’d mind.”

“I didn’t.” Mione called out.

“I won’t be long.” Thomas switched on the shower and, as promised, was soon out of it. Walking naked back into the bedroom, he climbed into bed, shivering slightly at how cold the sheets were.

Mione tapped her pen on the paper. “What’s a six letter word for ‘aviation casualty of Greek mythology’?”

“Icarus.” Thomas answered without hesitation.

Mione grimaced. “That clue has been driving me mad for the last twenty minutes, and you solve it in a few moments.” Mione returned to her final clues, filling them in now that Thomas had supplied the answer to a clue she knew she should have guessed. After finishing the crossword, she threw the paper onto her side table and took a mouthful of the Baileys liqueur she had brought up to drink.

Thomas could tell that she was mulling something over. “What is it?”

Mione leant back against the headboard. “Why do you think Dominus didn’t kill Cammie?”

“Why do you?” Thomas countered.

“I don’t know.” Mione rubbed her forehead. “I just can’t see why he kept her alive.”

“To turn her.” Thomas told Mione his true reasoning behind not killing Cammie.

"Perhaps." Mione began to chew her lip. "Thomas, can I tell you something?"

Thomas recognized the plaintive tone in Mione's voice. "What is it?"

"It's about Dominus." Mione decided that now was a good time to finally tell Thomas who both Dominus and she were. "He's not what he seems."

"Mione, none of us are." Thomas spelled his bedside lamp off.

"You really don't want to talk about this, do you?" Mione couldn't miss her husband's reluctance to discuss Dominus. "Why?"

"Because Cammie's back with her parents, and you could spend all night second-guessing exactly what Dominus was thinking." Thomas responded. "Only one person knows why Cammie's still alive."

"Dominus." Mione murmured softly, before hurriedly blurting out what else she needed to say before Thomas could stop her. "Thomas, there's something you should know about him. He isn't from this world and neither am I."

Thomas decided to see how Mione would take the truth now, two years after their marriage. "Very well. If you want to talk about this then that's what we'll do." He moved closer to her. "Mione, I already know you're not from this world."

"What?" Mione twisted around to face him.

"I said I know." Thomas said softly. "We've already discussed this before."

Mione frowned. "Why don't I remember?"

"Because not long before our wedding, I obliterated you after I found out that you were once known as Hermione Snape." Thomas waited for his wife to make the connection.

Mione thought back, and she realized how he must have found out. "You saw my name on the parchment you said you spilled potion on. But why didn't you just tell me then that you knew who I was?" It was obvious when she made the connection, when mere moments later, the glass of Baileys slipped through Mione's fingers and splattered over the bed covers. "Please tell me you're not him."

"I can't." Thomas' voice was gentle as he reached out and tenderly caressed her cheek.

Mione didn't try to stop the tears that welled up in her eyes, before spilling over her cheeks and splashing over Thomas' fingers. "It's not fair. All I wanted was to be happy."

"And all I want is for you to be happy, which is why I don't have any choice in what I'm about to do." Thomas leant forward and kissed each of Mione's eyelids, feeling her tremble beneath his lips. He then reached over and picked up his wand.

When Thomas drew her into his arms, Mione didn't even attempt to resist, knowing it would do little good, as she started to cry on his shoulder. Thomas then softly whispered the word that would undo their conversation. "Obliviate." After doing what was necessary, Thomas curled up against Mione's back, lying awake as he listened to her soft breathing.

A voice interrupted his reflection. "Fly too close to the sun again, did we, Thomas?"

Thomas rolled over and spelled the lights back on, cognizant of the fact that the sleeping spell would stop Mione from waking. "You've come all the way here just to compare me to Icarus?"

Atropos grinned as she sat on the edge of the bed. "I was bored."

"Piss off." Thomas usually wasn't so crude but he really was in no mood to deal with the Fate.

“That’s not nice, Thomas.” Atropos ran a long fingernail down his bare chest and stomach. “You do know that you can’t keep obliterating her like this. One day she’s going find out who you are again, and perhaps next time she’ll leave you before you get the chance to strip away the truth.” Atropos’ hand disappeared below the sheet.

Thomas slapped it away. “I’ve already told you that I’m not in the market.”

Like most people, Atropos still wanted what she couldn’t have, even given Thomas’ true character. “She’ll never know. The sleeping spell you’ve put on her won’t wear off for some time yet, and as I had to settle for second best last time, I…”

Thomas gave a malicious smile as he interrupted. “Funny, that’s pretty much what Regulus said about you.”

Atropos’ face turned ugly. “How dare he.”

Thomas didn’t care how upset Atropos was by his comment, and he wasn’t willing to play her mind games. “Atropos, unless you have something of import to tell me, I suggest you get out.”

Atropos didn’t leave. Instead she got up and walked around to the side of the bed that Mione was lying on. “You want so badly for her to accept you for what you are, don’t you, Thomas?”

“It’s none of your business what I want.” But Thomas’ face had betrayed the fact that Atropos had hit the bullseye.

It was now Atropos’ turn to smirk maliciously as she ran a finger down Mione’s face. “Don’t deny it; it’s so obvious that that’s exactly what you want.”

“Fine, it’s what I want.” Thomas snapped. “Are you here to tell me how to achieve me or just to mock me?”

“Neither.” Atropos dropped her hand from Mione’s face. “I’m here to warn you about what will happen if she ever manages to accept you.”

“I’m listening.” Thomas’ tone was short.

Atropos returned to Thomas’ side, placing her hand on his chest. “Even if Mione does accept you, every time she lets you make love to her, a little piece of her will fade away.” Atropos leant forward, whispering in Thomas’ ear, deliberately letting her mouth brush against his ear. “She’ll struggle to balance her guilt over knowing what you’ve done to her friends and family and her love for you. And one day she’ll wake up and she’ll be yours entirely, but she’ll also be a mere shadow of the woman she is now; an empty shell, a caricature of the woman you fell in love with.”

Thomas didn’t reveal his trepidation at Atropos’ words as she straightened up. “Do you know this for a fact, or are you just trying to even the score because I’ve rejected you?”

With this world’s future clouded for her, Atropos didn’t know it for certain, but she was aware that someone like Mione wouldn’t be able to deal with the truth. “The reason doesn’t matter. If you truly value your wife’s love, you’d reconsider your goals.”

“Are you saying that I should give up my search to unite the Pillars?” Thomas’ voice was more than a little sarcastic.

“That’s up to you.” Atropos ran a hand over Thomas’ face.

Fed up with her touching him, Thomas reached up and grabbed Atropos’ hand firmly in his own. “Atropos, you must think me a fool if you believe I’d give up my destiny because of your petty resentment.”

Atropos winced as Thomas painfully squeezed her fingers together. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“I’ll consider myself duly warned.” Thomas let go Atropos’ hand, satisfied when she rubbed her fingers. “Now get out.”

Unfazed, and after blowing Thomas a kiss, Atropos vanished, leaving Thomas alone with his wife. After spelling out the lights, Thomas lay down again, once more pulling Mione against him. As he stroked her leg, he considered what Atropos had said and subsequently dismissed it as a ploy to turn him from his chosen path, before closing his eyes and drifting off to sleep.

The individual who had been watching the altercation in the garden font sighed heavily. "You just couldn't resist, could you, Atropos?" Then like Atropos, she too vanished.

Next Chapter: The trio make a potentially disastrous decision.

Chapter 52: The Worst Mistake

31st October 2005

By four-thirty, Mione was unable to bear the wait any longer, and after speaking to H.J., was told to come round.

On entering the family room at Potter Place, Thomas was barrelled into by Cammie. "Whoa, you almost knocked me over."

"I've missed you so much." Cammie hugged Thomas.

"I imagine you've probably missed the Island and the airplane more." Thomas remarked wryly as a grinning Cammie moved to hug Mione.

Mione couldn't help but stare at her niece. "You've really grown."

"So everyone keeps telling me." Cammie yawned. "Sorry but I'm still tired after yesterday."

Harry Potter walked into the room, and Mione held out her arms. "I think you deserve a hug."

Harry went red as Mione hugged him. "I just did what anyone would have."

Thomas doubted that very much. "I suspect that's quite untrue." Thomas then reluctantly but politely held out his hand.

Harry shook it. "It's good to see you again, Sir."

"I didn't imagine that our next meeting would be quite like this." Thomas knew that Harry had no idea that Thomas had expected their next meeting to have been that evening.

"Neither did I." Harry glanced at Cammie. "Then again I didn't imagine that the young woman being held by Dominus was my cousin."

“And speaking of Dominus, how does it feel to know that you’re responsible for relieving him of Cammie’s presence?” Thomas asked, noting the shadow of the Dark Mark showing through Harry’s white shirt sleeve. Seeing it there only deepened the mystery as to how Harry had managed to escape the inevitable.

“Good but I’m just glad that she’ll never have to go through anything like that again.” Harry answered modestly.

“Thanks to you.” Cammie smiled adoringly at Harry. “If you hadn’t been so brave, I’d still be stuck in Castrum House with him.”

“How were you treated there?” Thomas wanted to hear it directly from Cammie.

Cammie’s smile vanished. “Okay.”

“Did he hurt you badly?” Mione was a little worried at the loss of the smile.

“No-one laid a finger on me, unless we were dueling.” Cammie revealed. “If I misbehaved, my punishments were more of a visual nature.”

Mione didn't understand. “What do you mean by visual nature?”

Cammie shivered as she remembered her last punishment. “A week ago I was practicing my dueling with Dominus and I managed to get past his defenses. Unfortunately I failed to hide how pleased I was.”

H.J., who’d joined them, was stunned. “You managed to hurt him?”

“A nick on his neck.” Cammie revealed. “But I went too far by showing how delighted I was.”

“Can we see?” H.J. was interested to view the memory.

Cammie shrugged, not sure if she wanted to share it or not. “I don’t have a pensieve.”

“I’ll ask Harry to fetch his.” H.J. went over to his brother and passed on his request.

Mione turned to Cammie as Harry Sebastian vanished. “How do you think you managed to get past his defenses?”

“You’ll see from the memory.” Thomas had told Cammie why she’d managed to get a hit in.

Harry returned almost immediately with the pensieve, and extracted the memory from Cammie. And it was a far bigger group who entered the pensieve than had listened to Cammie’s revelation.

Once inside Cammie asked her Uncle, 'can I begin?' showing exactly how familiar she was with a pensieve and its inner workings as, when he nodded, she started the memory.

Cammie’s Memory

“Are you ready?” The gold-masked individual asked as he took his place opposite the young woman.

Cammie nodded. “Yes, Sir.”

“On the mark of three.” Thomas’ wand flicked out and large numbers appeared.

Cammie readied herself. As soon as the countdown ended, she hit the floor, while at the same time sending a disarming spell at Thomas.

Thomas decided to start easy and sent the same spell back. “That’s child’s play, Cammie.”

“Reducto.” Cammie immediately stepped up her attack as Thomas taunted her.

“Conseco.” Thomas sent back a slicing curse even as he deflected Cammie’s attack.

As the spell connected, Cammie cried out but didn’t drop her wand, instead sending back a curse at Thomas. “Fervefacio Cruor.”

“You were stupid.” Thomas chided, as his shield absorbed the blood-boiling curse. “Next time shield, girl.”

Cammie did just that as a heart stopping curse headed her way. She then vanished, reappearing behind Thomas. “Cultellus.”

Not expecting Cammie to use apparition, Thomas had to swing around in an attempt to dodge the curse. He was successful but missed Cammie’s whispered second attempt, the curse catching him on the side of the neck. “Dammit.”

Cammie stopped casting spells in disbelief. “I did it. I hit you.”

Thomas also stopped, and walked over to Cammie. “You most certainly did.”

“Yes.” In her delight, Cammie totally forgot about how dangerous the man in front of her was, and she punched the air. “Yes, yes, yes. I ...” Her words trailed away as Thomas’ hand settled on her shoulder.

Thomas had been about to congratulate her but irritation set in instead. “Aren’t you going to finish the sentence, my dear?”

Cammie knew that whenever Thomas used the phrase ‘my dear’, she was in trouble. “No, Sir.”

“A wise decision.” Thomas’ voice was silky smooth. “I think it’s time for your next lesson.” He then apparated them to his rooms, and took out his pensieve, before inserting a memory.

Cammie had little choice but to take Thomas’ hand and allow him to pull her inside the pensieve. “What am I about to see?”

“My attack on the French Ministry.” Thomas began the memory. “Now watch.”

Cammie was shaking and white by the time the memory had ended. “You absolutely massacred them.” Cammie glanced at the cut that was still visible on his neck. “You let me hurt you to prove a point, didn’t you?”

Thomas shook his head. “No, I was barely paying attention to your efforts as my mind was on other things, and I didn’t expect you to apparate. It was my arrogance that you wouldn’t be able to get past my defenses that led to your minor victory. Just as it was their arrogance that led to their deaths. Do you understand today’s lesson?”

Cammie nodded. “Yes, Sir.”

“Good.” Thomas pulled them out of the memory. “Now return to your rooms.”

Current time

Having only seen a partial memory of the attack on the French Ministry provided by Claudette, the sole survivor on the floor where the attack had happened, Harry shook his head in disbelief, now having viewed the entire attack thanks to Cammie. “I can’t believe they were actually stupid enough to taunt him.”

“They didn’t know who they were dealing with.” H.J. remarked. “If they had, they’d have kept their mouths shut.”

“Which was one of the warnings behind my lesson.” Cammie was grateful when Harry Potter put his arm around her.

“Are you okay?” Harry had seen how pale his cousin had gone viewing her own memory.

“I’m fine.” Cammie reassured him.

Harry Sebastian hesitated, not wanting to upset his niece, but aware that memories like this could play a vital clue in giving him some more insight into how Dominus now fought. "Cammie, did he always use memories like that one to provide lessons?"

Cammie nodded. "Yes. I've seen quite a few."

"Such as?" Harry prompted.

"One of the first memories I was shown was of his recruitment meeting, and how he dealt with his opposition. I think he was trying to teach me some obedience when I refused to speak to him." Cammie left the pensieve and withdrew several of her memories, before placing them in it.

"Did he teach you how to do that?" Harry Sebastian had stepped out with her.

"Yes." Cammie then revealed why. "He liked me to use a pensieve to review my dueling lessons to see where I was going wrong."

The pair re-entered the pensieve and Cammie began the first memory. "This is the first meeting."

Harry Potter pointed himself out. "That's me, and you'll have no problem working out which one is Mum."

The group then watched in silence, and, after the memory ended, Mione unknowingly derided her husband's feat. "Beating three men is hardly a major accomplishment. Harry could easily do that."

"Maybe so, but it was enough to convince everyone to join him." Cammie informed her aunt. "My next memory is one I don't totally understand. But I do know it has to be something to do with what Uncle Harry told me about Dominus on the night I helped him to escape. And it was actually the very first memory Dominus ever showed me."

"What was the lesson behind it?" Mione asked, aware that there had to have been one.

"Don't bite off more than I can chew." Cammie smiled wryly. "And for doing that, my first visual lesson was viewing two guards being portkeyed into a cell with a werewolf for allowing Uncle Harry to escape. A few days later Dominus made me watch the memory I'm about to show you."

The group watched as the memory began and in it a dark-haired man turned to a crowd of Death Eaters. "I've agreed on a little demonstration for you all. No-one is to interfere or I will make your family suffer for your interference while you watch. Do I make myself my clear?" Hurried assurances spilt forth from the mouths of the crowd.

Recognizing the memory, H.J. immediately halted it, aware of what it would mean to Mione. "Mione, are you happy for everyone to see this?"

When Harry Sebastian smiled encouragingly at her, Mione hesitated and turned to face Thomas. "Thomas, I know we said that we wouldn't discuss our pasts, and while this memory isn't linked directly to me, it is linked to my past."

"Is this important to you?" Thomas resigned himself to the possibility that he'd have to lie to his wife after watching the memory, whether he wanted to or not.

Mione erected a privacy bubble before answering. "Yes it is but I need to warn you. You're not going to be happy when you find out the truth about me." She bit her lip. "And I'm afraid you're going to reject me when you do."

"I'd never reject you." Thomas put his arms around Mione's waist. "No matter what you told me about you."

"You can't say that." Mione thought Thomas was being a little naïve, and she used the most extreme example she could think of to test

him. "What if I said that I was Dominus? You couldn't turn around and tell me that you'd never reject me then."

"Mione, even if you told me that, I'd still love and want you. I really don't care about your past; just our future." Thomas answered honestly. He then decided to use the situation to pose a question of his own, Atropos' words of the previous night weighing more on his mind than he cared to admit. "Mione, if I said the same to you about Dominus, would you still love me?"

Mione immediately responded. "Of course."

"Don't just answer automatically." Thomas' face was serious. "Would you still love me no matter what I'd done?"

Believing he was just using Dominus as she'd done, to prove a point, Mione nodded. "I'd love you no matter what."

Thomas pulled Mione tightly against him. "You have no idea how much hearing you say that means to me."

"I think I do." Mione returned the embrace. "I love you so much."

"And I love you." Thomas kissed her firmly on the mouth. "And no matter what I see in this pensieve, nothing is going to change that."

Mione dropped the bubble, and turned to the others. "Okay, we can go on now."

H.J. turned to face the memory and pointed out the frozen Harry Lupin. "Just for those of you who don't know. That's actually me."

Harry Potter had been staring at the young man who was frozen in the tableau. "He looks like me, except his hair is a little longer, and he's not wearing glasses."

"He is you in a manner of speaking." Harry Sebastian answered. "But at that moment he's also H.J. even though he's not really."

"I don't understand." Harry Potter couldn't stop staring.

H.J. could see that they were freaking the young man out, and he began to explain. "Let me start at the beginning. As hard as it might be to believe, I'm not from this world. And in the world I was born in, I was called Harry Potter, and just as you exist here, I existed there as did Voldemort or Dominus as you know him. Unlike you, however, I was destined to have to face him to try and defeat him. Unfortunately because the fight against Voldemort was going badly and we were about to lose, I ended up invoking a time-travel ritual but it didn't turn out as it should have. Instead of my soul merging with an earlier version of myself, I ended up surviving as a separate soul."

"So there were two of you in an earlier version of yourself?" Cammie queried to make sure she'd understood H.J. correctly. When H.J. nodded, she asked another question about the frozen Harry. "So if you're him, why do you look different now?"

H.J. tried to make it as clear as he could. "The memory you're about to show everyone involves what happened to Voldemort. I pushed him through the Propylaeum, but instead of dying as we'd thought, he fell through it to here and became Dominus. And, after basically hijacking the body of the Harry you can see there to attack Voldemort, I spent a short time in Azkaban for sealing a group of Death Eaters in the Death Chamber with a werewolf."

Cammie wondered how her father had managed to get out of Azkaban if he'd committed murder. "How did you get out?"

"I blackmailed Minister Fudge with a little help from a friend." H.J. felt a little uneasy discussing this with his daughter, but he believed she needed to know the truth. "When I returned to the mainland, I had to give Harry his body back. I therefore agreed to allow the merger, which should have taken place when I carried out the time-traveling ritual, to take place, meaning I didn't exist as me anymore. Then one day I found myself in the Death Chamber and was offered a second chance at life if I came after Dominus. After being offered Jamie Potter's body, I took it. But I couldn't face looking like him so I now wear a glamour."

“Who’s Jamie Potter?” Harry Potter asked.

“He is.” Harry Sebastian pointed out a young man standing on the dais. “Let’s watch the rest of the memory, and I’ll explain some more afterwards.”

However, before he could restart the memory Harry Potter stopped him. “Hold on. If H.J. is in Jamie Potter’s body now, what happened to him?” Harry Potter pointed at his doppelganger.

“He’s standing next to you.” H.J. pointed to his brother.

Thomas sucked in his breath as shock ripped through him, and, even though he now knew the truth, he still asked the inevitable question. “You’re both from that world?”

Harry, who rarely detected any strong emotion from Thomas, could now feel surprise. “I know it’s hard to believe but it’s the truth. It’s also where Mione is from.”

“So why isn’t she there?” Cammie pointed at the frozen tableau.

“Because I was in a coma.” Mione explained. “I interrupted a pureblood duel believing I was saving my father and paid for it with my life.”

“Your life?” Harry Potter and Cammie echoed together.

“I died.” Mione tilted her head back and gave Thomas a frightened look as this was what she’d been most afraid of telling him, feeling reassured when he kissed her on the forehead, and murmured that it was alright.

“So how can you be here now if you died?” Cammie was completely confused.

“Let me show you a memory of mine.” Harry Sebastian left the pensieve and, when he returned, he played out some of the memory

of his time with the Fates, and the initial meeting with H.J. and Mione. "And even though she'd died, Mione isn't a ghost in this world because they don't exist here."

"What's a ghost?" Cammie had never heard the word before, until Harry's memory had played out.

"I'll show you." This time H.J. left the pensieve, before returning a few moments later. "These are the ghosts from Hogwarts."

Cammie was enchanted as she watched the ghosts flitting around. "I wish we had had ghosts at school."

Mione realized that Cammie didn't understand. "Ghosts are people who died violently or believe they have unfinished business, Cammie. They can't move on, and are trapped forever unless they can come to terms with their deaths or are exorcised, meaning that their souls are destroyed."

Cammie was horrified as the implications of what it meant registered with her. "So would you be a ghost if you returned to your world?"

"I don't know for sure." Mione leant against Thomas, taking comfort from his warmth. "But I think so, as I didn't want to leave Harry when I died."

"Leave Harry?" Cammie didn't understand.

Mione gripped Thomas' hand tightly as she realized what she was going to have to reveal. "I was married to Harry up until I died."

Thomas could feel Mione shaking, and he lowered his mouth to her ear. "I love you."

Mione couldn't help herself and turned to face Thomas, burying her face against him as she struggled momentarily with her tears, before turning back to face everyone, and continuing. "When Harry and I arrived here we tried again, but over twenty years had passed and we

were two different people, so it didn't work. Then I met Thomas, and now I couldn't be happier."

Thoroughly intrigued by what she'd just learnt, Cammie had more questions, especially given that Mione had remarried. "Do you think you'll get married again, Uncle Harry?"

Harry smiled lovingly at Cassandra. "One day."

Cassandra knew that Harry's previous marriage would eventually also come up. "I think you should tell them about Seville, Harry."

"Who's Seville?" Cammie could see that she was obviously someone Harry didn't really want to talk about.

"Voldemort's daughter." Harry shifted uncomfortably. "And she was also my last wife."

Harry Potter couldn't hide his disgust. "Why would you marry someone like that?"

"Seville wasn't like her father." Harry defended his former wife. "She was a warm, caring person."

"Did you love her?" Thomas wondered how Harry had felt about his daughter.

Harry decided to be brutally honest. "After Mione died I went off the rails for a while, and I didn't treat women as respectfully as I should have. And while I cared about Seville, I slept with her not because I was in love with her, but because I wanted her. Unfortunately I got her pregnant but I did the right thing and married her."

"So I take it that's a no?" Thomas queried.

"I did love Seville but I was never in love with her." Harry sighed. "And I respected her as the mother of my children but that's it."

“And was she in love with you?” Thomas found himself unable to drop the subject.

“Yes.” Harry knew that when they’d first married, Seville had been. “But over time I think we became more of a habit than anything else. She had her work, I had mine, and the time we spent together grew less and less, so I stayed with her until our daughters were old enough to deal with my going.”

“What instigated your leaving?” Thomas knew that Mione had been quite clever in hiding this from him, and he’d never suspected anything.

“I’d been having dreams about Mione for some time where she was asking for my help, and with every dream she’d move closer to the Propylaeum.” Harry then told them how long he’d left it before going. “I waited until only her fingertips were visible before leaving.”

“Do you regret it, Uncle Harry?” Cammie could see how sad Harry looked.

“Sometimes, when I think about the children I do.” Harry admitted. “But I wouldn’t have met Cass if I hadn’t.”

“Can I see my cousins?” Cammie asked.

Harry wasn’t surprised by Cammie’s request, particularly given her need to belong to family, which because of the spell she’d spent in Castrum House, was now stronger than ever. “I don’t see why not.”

After Harry had picked a memory that was a favorite of his, Thomas watched an older Harry laughing and joking with three girls and a boy, who Harry explained he’d adopted. “They look like you, except for the youngest.”

“Seville was thrilled that Tara looked like her.” Harry had to resist the urge to reach out and touch his daughter, knowing his hand would go through the image if he did. He then ended the memory.

Cammie had noticed that the memory hadn't got Seville in it, and she asked after Harry's former wife. "So why didn't Seville come with you, or didn't you tell her?"

"I didn't tell her." Harry confirmed. "Our daughters needed her, and I had no idea if I was going to my death or not. And to be truthful, I didn't want to tell her. So I bid her goodbye, picked up the few items I planned to bring with me, promoted my brother Orion to replace me, and then left to go to the Death Chamber."

"So what did you do in your world?" Thomas was now trying to ascertain what was truth and what was not. He knew now that it was unlikely that he could believe anything that Mione had told him before their wedding or what Harry had told him when he'd been torturing him, as both had been able to lie convincingly.

"Head of Auror Division." Harry watched Thomas' expression change to one of understanding. "Now you can see why I was able to give a demonstration as I did at USAD."

"What were you like then?" Cammie was lapping everything up and she wanted to see more. "Dad said you can be quite nasty now."

H.J. had been filling Cammie in on what he'd been doing at BritAD, and what Harry was like as a teacher.

"Did he now?" Harry glowered at H.J., who had the good grace to blush, before withdrawing and placing yet another memory in the pensieve before returning. "This is a training session with a new group of first years." He then began the memory.

"Barden, if you can't defend against a simple disarming spell, then you don't deserve to be here." Harry barked. "Get out, and don't bother coming back until you can show me you've earned this position."

A dark-haired young man stalked out of the room, embarrassment easy to recognize on his features.

Harry turned back to the other trainees. "And if anyone else fails, you'll be joining Barden."

Ten minutes later, when yet another trainee had suffered the same fate as Barden, Harry shook his head in disgust. "While I've made examples of Barden and Caruthers, don't think that any of you are any better. You're not. Now get out of my face."

The memory ended. Harry grinned at his niece. "So what do you think?"

Cammie had thought Harry quite ruthless and unforgiving. "You were actually quite frightening."

Cassandra had to laugh at Cammie's face. "He still is, Cammie." She shared a quick mischievous look with H.J. "I'll let you into a secret. Some of the trainees call him Sebastian the Sadist."

Harry swung around when H.J. sniggered. "You started it?"

"I didn't have to." H.J. responded. "But you can be a complete git, Harry. You could cut us a little slack sometimes."

Harry shook his head in the same manner as he had in the memory. "Didn't our duel yesterday morning teach you anything, H.J.?"

"That you push too hard sometimes." H.J. responded.

"Because pushing you hard is what's going to keep you bloody well alive." Harry snapped, more than a little pissed at H.J.'s attitude. Watching as his dismayed niece slipped her hand into Harry Potter's, Harry curbed his temper, and he lowered his voice. "Experience and practice are everything."

"Your demonstration at USAD proved that." Thomas backed Harry's premise, amused at Harry taking H.J. to task.

"That's true but what H.J. seems to keep forgetting is that no matter how good I know I am, I'm also aware that..." Harry brought up

Cammie's memory of Voldemort back up, and pointed at the dark-haired man. "...he is better."

"And in case you've forgotten, I managed to beat him after that duel." H.J. reminded Harry.

"You didn't beat him." Harry argued. "You sent him here."

"I didn't know what would happen." H.J. countered. "I thought I was killing him as one of us was destined to do."

Cammie latched onto the word 'destined' and asked her Uncle a question. "You also mentioned that you were destined to kill Dominus when I rescued you. What did you mean by that?"

Harry explained. "In my world there were two prophecies relating to me and Voldemort."

"Can we hear them?" While he was aware of the prophecy relating to the flower mother in its entirety, Thomas had never heard the full prophecy relating to being defied thrice, Severus having failed to catch everything that Dumbledore had been told by Trelawney when Severus had been carrying out his initiation task for Thomas.

James and Tonks chose that moment to join them. "What are we missing?"

Harry Sebastian brought them up to speed. "And I'm just about to tell everyone the prophecies I'm aware of."

Tonks hadn't heard them yet. "I'm all ears." She proved it by growing her ears to a large size before shrinking them again.

A smile on his face at Tonks' antics, Harry then began to recite the prophecies which he still knew by heart.

"Separate the twin sons of the flower mother

She must deny her firstborn her love

For his brother to be victorious

Over the Dark Lord."

Harry took a deep breath before continuing. "That's the first one, and the second one is:

‘To parents who’ve defied him thrice

One of two born as the seventh month doth end

Shall defeat the Dark Lord

Else darkness shall descend

He must make a terrible choice

Or else his world he’ll sacrifice

Of the twins who bear the mark

He much choose, light or dark.”

Cammie was still none the wiser. "What do they mean?"

Harry began to explain the prophecies. "As you’ve probably worked out, it was my body that H.J. hijacked, and therefore I too was once known as Harry Potter, albeit for a short time. I was also the firstborn mentioned in the prophecy, and Jamie and I were separated as a result of Voldemort’s attack on us."

"Attack?" Cammie had no idea what Harry was taking about.

Harry explained about how Voldemort had attacked their house, and James Potter had died defending him and his brother. "My mother survived but she believed me dead, so I didn’t get to know her until I was at Hogwarts." Harry then connected his explanation to the prophecies. "And even though Jamie wasn’t actually victorious over

Voldemort as he joined him, H.J. who is now my brother, was, so I believe that first prophecy has been fulfilled.”

“What about the meaning of the second prophecy?” Thomas was well aware that prophecies were tricky things.

Harry began to break it down. “My parents defied Voldemort three times. Both Jamie and I bore the Dark Mark; the only difference between us is that I chose to fight for the Light side and he chose Dark.” Harry’s face was somber as he thought about his twin brother. “So I think the prophecy has been fulfilled, but I can’t be sure. However, it doesn’t end there. The prophecy from H.J.’s timeline is different.”

H.J. related the one he knew.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches ... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies ... And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not ... And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives ... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."

H.J. glanced at Harry Potter. “I don’t believe this prophecy has been satisfied yet. And even though it doesn't exist here, I believe it could possibly apply to you as well.”

Harry Potter denied H.J.'s supposition. “My parents haven’t defied him thrice.”

“Your Mum has, at least twice.” Cammie reminded Harry about the first meeting where Lily had openly challenged Thomas.

“But Dad hasn’t.” Harry Potter pointed out.

James agreed with him. "That's true."

Considering the prophecies while Harry Potter argued his case, Cassandra asked a pointed question before making a valid statement. "What if the second prophecy hasn't been fulfilled either? Then it wouldn't apply to this world's Harry Potter. He isn't a twin."

James grimaced. "Actually he is."

Harry gripped Cammie's hand tighter. "Dad?"

"Lily miscarried a son who would have been your twin." James revealed. "We never mentioned it as she'd only been three months pregnant at the time."

"And you do bear his mark, don't you?" Thomas remarked, his mind going over what he'd just learnt.

Harry let go of Cammie's hand to rub his arm. "Yes, but that hardly counts as marking me as his equal as stated in H.J.'s prophecy."

Cammie wondered how H.J. and her Uncle had been marked. "How did he mark you and Uncle Harry as his equals, Dad?"

"Harry has a scar on his shoulder." H.J. removed his glamour. "Both Jamie and I had a lightning bolt scar on our foreheads as a result of the attack. And because this is Jamie's body, I still do." H.J. replaced his glamour, noting that Harry Potter had gone pale. "What is it?"

Harry Potter put a hand on his leg. "As Mum's apprentice, I sometimes duelled with Dominus. Once he used a slashing curse on me, and I wasn't allowed to heal it with magic to punish me for being so sloppy."

Cammie guessed what the scar looked like. "It's in the shape of the lightning bolt, isn't it?"

Harry nodded. "But that doesn't mean he considered me his equal."

"If he was dueling with you one on one, he did." H.J. said wryly. "So it looks as though it's the three of us in this together."

Harry Potter still disagreed, and repeated what he'd said about James. "Dad has never defied him, not even once, so you're wrong."

"By hiding you here he's defying him." Mione pointed out. "So there's your first occurrence, and as we have no idea who Dominus is, they could have already met and James could have unintentionally defied him in some way."

Thomas knew his wife had no idea how right she was. With Harry and Lily as part of his entourage, he'd also made the same offer to James, but he'd been refused, which had led to Aditi approaching Harry Sebastian. At the time, still wanting to keep his presence below the radar, Thomas had done to James as he'd done with Harry when he'd refused to join him, and obliterated the elder Potter and sent him on his way.

While Thomas was acknowledging to himself his wife's correct deduction, Harry Potter was responding to her. "Maybe so, but I still wouldn't stand a chance against Dominus. I didn't last any longer than the trainees lasted with Harry in that memory on any occasion I've dueled with Dominus."

"Then perhaps I should start giving you lessons." Harry Sebastian decided.

"But you said yourself he's better than you." Harry Potter really had no wish to take on Dominus.

"He's beatable. I managed it." H.J. reiterated his earlier statement.

"That was luck." His brother reminded him. "Perhaps a little refresher as to what happened to you before you 'beat him' would be beneficial." Harry restarted the memory that had begun the entire revelation in the first place.

The Death Chamber

H.J. held out a hand. "I need a wand."

“Give him a wand, Jamie.” Voldemort ordered.

Jamie did so, and H.J. winked cheekily at him. “I’ll try not to break it; then again I’m not promising anything.”

Voldemort walked down the steps and H.J. followed him, before holding up the wand he'd borrowed. "My terms are that if I win you let Lily Black leave unharmed, and if I lose I will freely offer you my blood."

"Agreed." Voldemort then touched his wand to H.J.'s before moving to the first level step of the benches. H.J. bowed and Voldemort did the same.

H.J. immediately sprang into action and sent a Reducto curse at Voldemort's arm, which missed as Voldemort side-stepped it while sending the same curse at H.J.'s legs.

H.J. jumped into the air and returned fire with a freezing curse, which Voldemort dispersed with a spectacular display of pyrotechnics. H.J. then threw up a reflective shield and watched as Voldemort did the same, the flames harmlessly rebounded off H.J.'s shield, some of them heading towards the crowd and others back towards Voldemort.

H.J. sent another spell as Voldemort lowered his shield. “Lente Mille Vengradis Sectum.”

Voldemort merely grimaced as small cuts began to make themselves known over his body. “Reparo Iniuria.”

As the small cuts dissipated, H.J. fired off yet another spell. “Nebulosus.”

Voldemort used a heat spell to cut his way through the fog that H.J. had instigated, and sent a spell towards him. “Toxicum Talum Milia.”

H.J. defended with a shield and the tiny darts dropped to the floor. “Steal that from Amicus, did you?”

Voldemort snorted. "No. He stole it from me. Saxum. Silex."

As a salvo of large stones headed towards him, H.J. managed to stop them with his rapidly weakening shield. Having already been depleted by the stones and the darts, Voldemort's second spell overloaded the shield, and a hail of small rocks flew through it towards H.J.. H.J. swore as hundreds of tiny razorblade sharp stones cut into his skin. "Screw this." H.J. let rip with a barrage of pain spells, hoping that one of them would reach Voldemort, who didn't even seem to be breaking a sweat. He finished his attack with the Cruciatus curse.

Voldemort smirked as he easily defended against all of the spells H.J. had sent his way. "My turn."

H.J. was hard pressed to hold out against the volley that Voldemort began to fire off. As Voldemort took a breath, H.J. hit out with a spell his father had invented. "Sectumsempra."

Blood bloomed from the cut that appeared from Voldemort's neck to his waist, but it was immediately stemmed as Voldemort incanted his next spell. "Stringo Fluo."

H.J. then used a spell that Mione recognized as inventing herself. "Pestifer Locusta Augustus."

Voldemort didn't move as a large cloud of Locust spread out, before coming together in a single column and heading towards him. Raising his wand, Voldemort sent forth a small whirlwind to crush them out of existence. "Turbo Contero."

H.J. was almost knocked off his feet as the whirlwind flew by him. He erected a shield, Voldemort using a spell that would sever H.J.'s wand hand if it hit him. Not giving H.J. time to recover, Voldemort started sending powerful blasting spells at H.J.'s shield.

As H.J.'s shield collapsed under the bombardment, Voldemort took advantage of it and delivered his penultimate spell. "Corium Abeo Renevo."

H.J.'s skin subsequently began to turn to dust before beginning to regrow itself as he sent a blasting curse at Voldemort. However, it was obvious that he was unable to concentrate on anything except for the spell affecting his entire body as H.J. missed, hitting one of the watching Death Eaters instead.

Voldemort used one final spell on H.J.. "Obscurum Visum."

As well as being in agonizing pain and unable to concentrate, H.J. was now also effectively blinded, and Voldemort casually walked up to him before placing his wand to H.J.'s bleeding head. "Do you yield, Harry?"

H.J. gasped out his words. "I yield."

Silence filled the pensieve as the memory served as not only a reminder for H.J., but for everyone else there, just how little effort Voldemort had put into the fight with H.J.

Harry Potter was the first to say something. "He didn't even bat an eyelid at the injuries you managed to inflict. And to be truthful I think he let them through. And he's even more skilled now, as Cammie's memory of that attack on the French Embassy proved. We're so fucked."

H.J. disagreed. "No, we're not. Just as Dominus has improved, so has Harry. And out of the three of us, he's the one who stands the most chance of taking Dominus on and succeeding."

"I'm not that good." Harry still stood by his own assessment of his skills against Dominus'. "He's far more powerful than me."

"Show them the memory of you at USAD." H.J. had seen it but he was aware that not everyone else had. "Let them be the judge of it."

Cassandra agreed with H.J. "I think it's only fair, Harry."

Harry reluctantly left the pensieve and when he returned the memory began playing.

Cammie was awestruck by the end of the memory. "You were brilliant, Uncle Harry."

"As I've already said it still doesn't mean I'm capable of beating Dominus, Cammie." Harry brushed off Cammie's remark, and he abruptly changed the subject, before H.J. could say anything different. "As everyone else is due to arrive shortly I think we should end this here for tonight."

Cammie's face dropped. "But I want to know more."

"And as you're not going to be leaving this house for the foreseeable future, you'll have plenty of time to view any memories I think you need to see." Harry informed his niece, not willing to let her view everything. "And the same goes for Harry. He's stuck here for the next six months, so he too can view the memories with you, and you can both train together." He then turned to Thomas. "Mione can fill you in on a lot of what's happened, but if you need to see any memories she can't supply, then just ask. If they're not personal, you're welcome to view them."

"Thank you." Thomas could already think of several memories he wanted to look at but knew he'd have to wait until Mione brought up the relevant subject.

"You're welcome. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm hungry." Harry vanished out of the pensieve, the others starting to follow.

Mione stopped Thomas from leaving with the others. "Thomas, wait."

Wanting to give them some privacy, James herded everyone into the dining room to wait for the other arrivals, even though no-one could hear what was being said in the pensieve after they'd left it.

Inside, Thomas took Mione into his arms. "I meant what I said earlier, Mione, about not changing my mind after what I've seen here."

"I don't disgust you?" Mione's voice quavered.

“Not at all.” Thomas kissed her tenderly.

“But I’m different than everyone else.” Despite his reassurance, Mione still couldn’t quite bring herself to believe Thomas.

“Tell me how you’re any different from me.” Thomas challenged. “You eat, sleep and breathe, just like I do.”

“My breathing is just an illusion.” Mione held up her hand. “I wear a ring that creates it.”

Thomas remembered how Mione had already told him this and had claimed she couldn’t remove the ring. He decided to see if she’d been lying or not. “Take it off.”

Mione tugged at the ring, which she never ever tried to remove, not wanting to see what she knew would be revealed if she did. “It won’t budge.” Her face looked slightly panicked. “I can’t get it off.”

“Perhaps it’s not meant to come off.” Thomas suggested, aware that his wife had indeed told him the truth about the ring. “Perhaps it’s giving you the life you didn’t think you had.”

Mione stopped trying. “I don’t know. Maybe it has something to do with what the Fates did to me.”

“Does it matter? You’re still you.” Thomas brushed Mione’s hair away from her face. “Let’s go eat dinner, and later we can talk as much as you want to.”

Mione closed her eyes as Thomas kissed her again. “I love you.”

“And I’ll always love you.” Thomas promised as he pulled them out of the pensieve.

Early next morning

Thomas scowled as he climbed out of the shower. He'd spent most of the night sitting up and talking with Mione, who was now sleeping soundly, exhaustion and tears taking their toll on her. "Atropos, I thought I told you yesterday to leave."

"But this is a brand new day and I decided your comment didn't apply to it." Atropos smirked as Thomas wrapped a towel around him. "Don't do that on my account."

"Just get on with whatever crap you've come to tell me." Thomas snapped as he secured the towel more firmly.

"It's about Mione." Atropos sat down on the edge of the bathtub, and revealed that she'd again been spying on Thomas and his wife via the font. "And her ring."

At the mention of the ring, Thomas found his interest was piqued, if somewhat unwillingly. "Did you mess with it?"

Atropos shook her head. "Neither I nor my sisters are capable of that kind of feat, but my mother is."

Thomas sighed heavily. "Great, another one of you."

Atropos knew then that Thomas had no idea of who her mother was. "She's nothing like us. Our powers pale into significance next to hers."

"So if she's so powerful, why hasn't she stopped me?" Thomas challenged Atropos' statement.

"Even being immortal has its limits, and I'm not sure that she's able to interfere with you." Atropos revealed. "But I do think she's the one responsible for Mione's ring becoming permanent. And with that permanence comes the possibility that Mione could now be killed like any other mortal."

Thomas hadn't even considered the likelihood. "So what do you want for telling me this?"

“Nothing.” Atropos rose fluidly to her feet. “Just remember it for future reference.” Having less than two hours left of mortal time, and not wishing to use it discussing Mione again, Atropos vanished.

And for the second night in a row, as he climbed into bed next to his wife, Thomas found himself considering what Atropos had told him, and like before, her words were far from welcome to him.

Next Chapter: Thomas discovers more about the Four Pillars as Sirius reveals what they know; Harry Potter reveals his feelings for Cammie; Thomas’ promised attack on Azkaban begins.

Chapter 53: Things Just Get Worse

1st December 2005

Sirius thanked everyone for joining him. "Up until now what I'm about to reveal has been confidential. But given Cammie's escape and her knowledge of what you're about to learn, after discussing it with Harry and Remus, I've decided to enlist your help. Cammie, it's all yours."

Cammie stood up. "When I was helping Uncle Harry to escape, the subject of Dominus and what he was seeking came up. It turns out that Uncle Harry was a little far gone from the poisons on the knife that Lily Evans used on him."

Harry Potter's mother had been stripped of her married name after the divorce. "I take it they were psychotropic drugs."

Harry nodded. "In a manner of speaking. They loosened my tongue and inhibitions, and I ended up revealing far more to Cammie than I should have done."

Cammie picked up where she'd left off. "Anyway, as a result of our conversation, I learnt that Dominus is seeking something called the Four Pillars, or Four Pilasters."

Mione broke into the conversation. "You can't be serious."

Cammie grinned at her aunt. "They're not Muggle twaddle."

"Do we know what they are?" Thomas needed to see how much the group knew about what he already owned.

"Sort of. I should start by telling you about a prophecy that relates to the Slayers." Remus recited the passage he'd memorized. "When the time of the Four Pillars arrives He of the Darkness shall come forth. He shall wield Curse, Crystal, Cipher and something to defeat all those who may challenge Him. And should He succeed then the Darkness will reign in this world and all others. There was a single word notation at the side of the passage; 'Clavis'."

“And it is the Clavis that Dominus was seeking when he attacked the French Embassy, and then me.” Sirius revealed. “It was also what he was after when he took Cammie and Cassie. Harry unfortunately had to tell him where to find it.”

“What is it?” Luna piped up.

“We believed it to be a key of some kind, probably the cipher in the description.” Remus revealed. “This was confirmed when Cammie made an unexpected find when she traveled to Egypt with Thomas and Mione. She found a second description of the Pillars.”

Cammie began to tell everyone about the trip to Egypt. “When we were visiting the Egyptian Museum we looked at some cartouches called the Cassus Cartouches. Muggles believed them to hold mystical powers that were said to grant the holder a long or endless life. The Cartouches were discovered by Dixon Jackson, an American archeologist, in 1812, and disappeared in what is believed to have been a theft in 1927, when they were actually moved to the magical section of the Egyptian Museum.”

“Is that where you saw them?” Harry Potter asked.

Cammie nodded. “Yes, and considering they’re supposed to be worthless, they were pretty well guarded.”

Mione grimaced. “I thought it was because they were extremely old. I’m beginning to think that the Egyptian Government knew differently.”

Thomas had to agree. “You’re probably right. Cammie, go on.”

Cammie smiled at her Uncle before resuming her speech. “Jackson declared that the Cartouches were part of the Four Pilasters but he said that he’d had problems translating a stone he’d found with the Cartouches, which may have revealed more about them.”

“Do we know where this stone is now?” Xander enquired, only half-listening as his fingers played with his wife’s hair.

“No.” Sirius shook his head. “And we have no idea where to start to looking for it or exactly what to look for.”

Thomas hid his satisfaction that while the others were now aware of the stone’s existence, they had no idea of its location, and he happily prompted his niece to go on. “Cammie, if I remember correctly, there was more, wasn’t there?”

Cammie nodded. “Jackson gave a similar description of four items like the ones in the Slayer prophecy; stone, spring, sign and schema.”

Remus took up the thread from Cammie. “After talking with Cammie, I now believe the Clavis to be both the sign and the cipher; something to be used to open the Propylaeum.”

Thomas played happily along. “Why open the Propylaeum?”

“It leads the way to other worlds.” Remus informed him. “Perhaps Dominus isn’t seeking to stay in this one.”

Thomas was now aware that they'd worked out what his plan was, and he continued to push to find out exactly what else they knew. “So how do the other three items tie in?”

“We believe that the Cartouches, which were stolen by Dominus in the raid on the British Museum, are the schema and the something that was blotted out in the Slayer prophecy, and are some sort of map of these worlds. But without seeing them, we can't be entirely sure.” Remus answered.

“ I thought nothing was stolen.” Katherine interrupted, as she recalled the newspaper report she'd read about the break-in.

“That's what the Egyptian Government asked us to say.” Sirius revealed to his daughter-in-law. “They didn’t want the embarrassment of the world believing that they aren’t capable of guarding their own artifacts. And also to spare the British Museum the same fate.”

“So we know that Dominus has two of the four Pillars.” Luna was paying more attention than her husband, who was now writing his name on her back with his finger. “What do you know about the other two?”

“Nothing.” Sirius got to the reason why he’d really decided to bring in everyone else as Remus had requested. “We know that the crystal and the rock have to be the same item. Which, if the something is the schema, it leaves a curse and a spring.”

"How can a curse and a spring be the same thing?" Harry Potter challenged. "And are we entirely sure that the two descriptions are of the same thing?"

Mione let out a tiny excited cry. “They are, and I know what the curse and spring is.” She turned to Thomas. “Do you remember when you were reading that book on the Fountain of Youth?”

Thomas had to admit he did. “Yes.” He then explained further to everyone else there. “I’d been reading a Muggle book about Juan Ponce de León and his expedition to Florida; its main subject being the Fountain. Mione spotted the book and laughed at me.”

Mione grinned at her husband. “I teased him about not wanting to get old which made me recall that I’d seen something about the Fountain of Youth in a magical book. To cut a long story short it’s a spell that’s supposed to help gain immortality.”

Luna sighed. “So if you could find it that easily, so could Dominus.”

Mione’s grin vanished as she acknowledged the truth of Luna’s words. “I found it in one of Thomas’ old books that I was cataloguing. Any number of purebloods with an old library probably has the same book, and knowing Dominus as we do, they’d be more than happy to help him.”

“So what about the crystal?” Luna tracked back to the final item. “What is it for?”

“We have no idea, just as we have no idea what it is.” Remus had hit dead end after dead end in his research.

Xander glanced up from his finger doodling, as he made a stab at answering his wife's question. “Power. It has to be. No matter how powerful this Dominus is, I bet he has to have something to fuel the opening of the Prop thingy.”

“Or to unite the Pillars.” Remus deduced. “I can’t believe I’ve been so bloody stupid not to think of it. The crystal has to be a power base of some kind.”

Mione gasped reflexively at the mention of a power base. Everyone turned to her, with Sirius asking the obvious question. “What is it, Mione?”

Mione glanced at her husband. “Can I tell them?”

Having little choice, Thomas nodded. “Go ahead.”

Mione revealed what she'd found for Thomas. “Several years ago I tracked down a ruby of immense power called the Validus Saxus, that could be what Dominus is looking for.”

Thomas went on further. “I acquired it from a man named Philip McCormack.”

Remus had known of him. “But he’s dead.”

“I know.” Thomas had made sure of it. “He died of a massive heart attack two weeks after I acquired the Saxus from him.”

Sirius and Harry exchanged significant looks, and Harry jumped to the wrong conclusion as Thomas hoped he would. “It looks as though Mione is right about the ruby. And I believe that Dominus was after the same thing you were, and killed him when he didn’t find it.”

Mione shared a worried look with her husband. “Do you think he’ll come after us?”

Thomas shook his head. "When I explained what I wanted the stone for, McCormack was quite frankly a little put out. But after a little negotiation, he swore an oath to keep my identity and my acquisition of the stone a secret."

Harry Sebastian had a question. "Why keep it a secret?"

Mione jumped in with what she believed to be the truth, a notion that Thomas hadn't bothered to disabuse. "It was for one of Thomas' hybrid generation companies, and as you might gather, its possible use could cause a great deal of controversy if the truth came out. Do you think Dominus knows we have it?"

Harry didn't think so. "If he went after McCormack two weeks after Thomas purchased the stone, Dominus would have already gone after you by now. Does anyone else know you have it?"

"Just a few trusted colleagues who are all sworn to secrecy." Thomas answered truthfully. "And as you'll appreciate, the fact I have it isn't something I want spread far and wide at the moment, especially as the time for its use isn't right yet. So I'm keeping it on the Island."

"Do you think it's safe there?" Sirius asked.

"You've been to the Island." Thomas challenged Sirius. "Can you tell me where it is?"

Sirius thought about it. "I know it's somewhere off the Florida coast but I couldn't tell you the exact location."

"That's because unless I key you into the wards, you can't apparate or portkey onto the Island, let alone find it." Thomas stated. "I had the wards upgraded just before I got married, and it's now unplottable both from above and around it. My wards extend almost eight miles out to sea, and while a Muggle satellite might be able to track me down, I don't foresee Dominus using one to find me."

Sirius found himself agreeing with Thomas. "Well that's one less thing to worry about." He then went on by summarizing their position. "So we know Dominus has definitely got two of the four Pillars, and if Mione is right about the spell, probably has a third. However, thanks to Thomas, the fourth is still out of his grasp."

"What about the stone that you mentioned earlier?" Luna interrupted. "Are we going to try and find it?"

"I'd brought everyone together to help us work out what the missing Pillars were." Sirius reiterated. "But now we know, I think we should try and focus on locating the stone that accompanied the Cartouches."

"Where do we even start?" Orion knew it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack.

"By tracking down Jackson." Mione responded logically. "We need to go where he went, learn what he learnt. There has to be a paper trail of some kind."

Remus gave her an affectionate smile. "You are brilliant in any world."

Thomas wasn't entirely sure that he liked the look Remus was giving his wife, and he pulled Mione against him. "It's why I married her."

Mione turned around and smiled up at him, completely unaware of Thomas' male posturing. "And I thought it was because you loved me."

"Well there was that." Thomas dropped a light kiss on her lips, before glancing over at Harry and Sirius. "Let me know if there is anything I can do to help."

"Can we have access to your library?" Harry asked. "Even though James and Sirius both have old libraries, there may be something in yours that they don't have."

“Of course.” Thomas was well aware that they’d be very unlikely to find anything relevant in his library. “I’ll arrange for portkeys for you and anyone else who needs them.”

Cammie jumped up. “Can I go?”

Mione turned to H.J. “Given what Thomas has done to the Island, she’ll be safe if she does.”

H.J. was only too glad to get his daughter away from Harry Potter, and agreed immediately. “Of course you can, Cammie.”

“What about Harry?” Cammie asked hopefully.

It was Sirius who crushed her hopes. “Harry is under house arrest, and that means he can’t leave this house, not even for this. And he can make good use of his research skills searching the Potter library.”

Harry Potter smiled softly at Cammie. “Go. After spending so long at Castrum House, it will do you good to get some fresh air.”

Thomas seconded his wife’s earlier comment. “You’ll be perfectly safe there, and the weather will still be nice enough for you to do some swimming and walking. After what you’ve gone through, no-one would expect you to hole up in the library all the time.”

The temptation of the Island was too much for Cammie, and she grinned. “For how long and when can I go?”

Mione was due some vacation but she knew she had too much on before Christmas. “Remus, would you mind if I took two or three weeks off after the New Year?”

Remus did but wasn’t going to ruin it for Cammie. “Of course not.”

Mione turned to Cammie. “So how about coming in the New Year and we return you on the 20th?”

Cammie's face lit up and she grinned at her mother. "Mum, is it okay with you as well?"

Hermione could see how happy her daughter was and she smiled. "Of course."

Thomas made an offer. "Do you want to visit as well? I can arrange a portkey if you want to. I know you don't like flying."

Hermione shuddered, remembering her flight to New York she'd been glad to escape from. "That's very kind of you, and I'd like that. I too have some vacation due so I can be there on the 10th."

H.J. couldn't. "I'm afraid I have classes I have to attend, so you'll have to count me out."

Cammie was a little disappointed but understood. "So when exactly can I go?"

Thomas told her. "Let's get New Year out of the way first. How about coming on the fifth? It will give Mione plenty of time to clear her desk of anything that's pending after the New Year, and we'll fly there when she finishes work."

Mione thought it was a great idea. "It will also give me a chance to fill Xander in on what he'll need to cover while I'm gone."

With that decided, the group disbanded.

25th December 2005

In the darkness of the early morning, Cammie sat bolt upright sweating, but she had no idea what had frightened her. Unholstering the wand that she now always wore, she spelled the lights on.

A quivering and visibly emaciated house-elf stood in front of her, holding a letter in its hand. "For Missy Mie."

"What are you doing here?" Cammie scrambled out of her bed but lowered her wand.

“I belongs to Missy Mie.” The house-elf held out the letter. “Master Dominus sends letter.”

Cammie stared at the letter as if it was an unexploded bomb. “I don’t want it.”

The house-elf’s lips quivered thinking that Cammie meant her as well. “Mitzy dies without Missy Mie.”

“I didn’t mean you, Mitzy.” Cammie assured the house-elf. “Place the letter on the dresser, and go down to the kitchen. Ask Bodie to give you something to eat and drink. Tell him Cammie sent you.”

Mitzy bowed low, a tear running down her cheek. “Mitzy love Missy Mie.”

“I love you too.” Cammie assured the house-elf. Once it left, Cammie got up and stared at the letter. She gave a tiny scream as the letter shot up into the air and flew open, before the paper inside was spat out and hovered in front of her.

From where she was standing Cammie could easily read the letter, but it proved unnecessary to do so as the letter began to relay its contents in a familiar voice.

‘My Dear Cammie

I hope this letter finds you well. I want you to know that I miss your company, and more particularly our chess games. But this letter isn’t about that. It’s to deliver a Christmas gift to you. The house-elf is already yours, and she has been pining away without you. If you don’t want her, give her clothing and dispose of her, or give her away.’

Cammie pulled a face of disgust at the casual dismissal of Mitzy, but she continued to listen.

‘My Christmas gift to you is on your finger.’

Cammie glanced down at her hands, just as a ribbon she hadn't spotted flew out of the envelope and wrapped itself around her arm, her wrist and through her fingers. Cammie cried out and tried to tug it away but to no avail. The letter, which had stopped speaking when the ribbon had shot out, continued.

'Don't be disturbed by the ribbon, it will soon dissipate. When it does, your ring will no longer be linked to me, and you'll be free to remove it. However, it will become a portkey keyed for you and you alone, and should you ever need help, grasp the ring, say 'Dominus Castrum', and you'll find yourself in your former rooms which will remain yours.

Merry Christmas

Dominus'

Cammie felt a tingle and the ribbon vanished. Shaking, she tried the ring, and as promised, it slid off her finger. Cammie immediately threw it across the room, before collapsing onto the floor. Once she'd recovered, she hurried out of her bedroom and along the corridor to her parents' room.

H.J. opened the door to find his ashen faced daughter standing there. "Sweetheart, what's wrong?"

Cammie found she couldn't speak, and simply launched herself at H.J.

"Did you have a nightmare?" H.J. rubbed her back, feeling Cammie shaking in his arms.

Hermione, hearing what H.J. had said, and despite Cammie's age, made an offer to her. "Cammie, do you want come and sleep in with us?"

Completely unnerved, Cammie nodded, and let H.J. lead her to get under the blankets of the big bed.

Hermione wrapped her arms around her daughter. "Close your eyes; we'll be here."

Cammie finally found her voice as she responded to Hermione's closeness. "Dominus sent me a letter. It was in my room."

H.J. picked up his dressing gown, and checked his wands. "I'll go take a look."

"H.J. are you sure it's a good idea?" Hermione asked worriedly.

"He wasn't there." Cammie assured her mother.

H.J. left and hurried up the corridor, his wands outstretched. Opening the door to Cammie's room, H.J. immediately caught sight of the letter on the floor. After casting spells on it, H.J. picked it up, read it and then made his way back to his bedroom.

Cammie was sitting with Hermione's arm around her. "Did you find it?"

"Yes." H.J. passed the letter to Hermione. "Where's the ring?"

"I threw it across the room." Cammie's voice was now under control. "I just wanted to get it away from me."

Hermione finished reading the letter. "So you can leave the house now, if you want to."

"Did the house-elf bring the letter?" H.J. asked, more interested in how it got there, rather than what it meant to his daughter.

"Yes." Cammie bit her lip. "She was so thin, Dad, and miserable looking. She said she'd die without me."

"She must have bonded to you." H.J. decided.

Cammie didn't think so. "I didn't do any ritual."

“House-elves who aren’t bonded have a tendency to bond with someone if they feel loved by that person.” H.J. knew quite a lot about house-elves thanks to Herms, who’d led a futile campaign to try and free them.

"She did do everything for me." Cammie said in reflection. "Even going so far as to sneak food to me when I was supposed to miss meals."

H.J. decided he'd been correct with his assessment. "I think she's become emotionally attached to you, and a bond has been created naturally."

“Dad, why do you think Dominus let her come to me?” Cammie yawned as she lay back against the pillows. “And why did he release me from the ring?”

“I really don’t know.” H.J. had no idea what was motivating Dominus. “But I think, as Potter said, Dominus does like you for some reason.” H.J. turned as a knock sounded at the door, and he withdrew both wands. “Who is it?”

“James, Nymy and Harry.” James called out.

H.J. opened the door. “Don’t tell me, you’ve had a letter from Dominus.”

“Yes. I was concerned about Mie, and when I found she was missing from her room, I woke Dad up.” Harry was relieved to see Cammie was in bed with Hermione. “Did you also get a letter, Mie?”

Cammie nodded. “Not just a letter though. Dominus also sent me Mitzy, who was carrying it. I told her to put it down, but it opened and read itself to me. During the recital, a ribbon shot out of it, wrapped around my arm and hand, and once it vanished, I was able to take my ring off.”

“He wasn’t quite so nice to me.” Harry’s voice was betraying how shaken he truly was.

H.J. took the letter that James was holding and read it out loud.

‘Potter

You lie in your bed in the perceived safety of your bedroom, your boots tucked under your chair, and your clothes neatly folded on your ottoman. But I want you to know that you’re not safe. I could kill you now while you sleep, but that would hardly be any sport. So for now sleep well, for when our paths cross again, and believe me they will, I’ll finish what I set out to do on the day you took my ward.

D.’

Cammie had found herself shifting even closer to Mione. “He was here?”

“My boots are under my chair, and my clothes folded up just as he said.” Harry shivered. “He must have wrote that while I slept.”

H.J. was horrified. “I thought the wards here were impenetrable.”

“They haven’t been disturbed.” James had checked to see if they’d been broken into. “I don’t know how he did it.”

“Dad wants to invoke the Fidelius.” Harry told the trio. “And he wants Uncle Sirius to be the secret-keeper.”

“I’m going there now, but I wanted to check to see if you were alright first.” James headed back towards the door. “Can Nymy and Harry stay in here with you?”

“Of course.” H.J. patted the bed. “Tonks, you can get in with Cammie and Hermione.”

Tonks, who was shivering, didn’t bother arguing. “Thanks.”

Harry moved to sit by the fireplace. “I don’t think I can sleep in my room again.”

“I feel the same way.” Cammie leant back against the pillows. “And my letter wasn’t in the same vein as yours.”

H.J. stoked the fire. “Bodie.”

The house-elf appeared. “Mister H.J.”

“Can you bring hot chocolate for the girls, and I’d like a scotch.” H.J. needed something stronger than a sweet beverage. “Harry?”

“A warm milk.” Harry didn’t want liquor even though he was badly shaken.

“I’ll take a scotch.” Tonks called out.

When James returned five minutes later, a sleepy and pajama clad Sirius in tow, he found the group chatting quietly amongst themselves. “Alcohol at five in the morning?”

Tonks stuck out her tongue. “Yes, and I’m about to have another.”

Sirius’ lips quirked at Tonks. “Get me one as well.”

James stared at Harry’s milk. “I thought out of everyone you’d have had a drink.”

Harry shook his head. “I’d prefer to keep my wits about me.”

“And I’d prefer to be drunk.” Tonks responded as Bodie reappeared with another glass for Sirius, and her own refilled.

Sirius took the glass of scotch, and sat down. “Okay folks. The Potters and the Sebastians can be found at Potter Place, Grimmauld Square, London.”

Hermione hadn’t even realized that she didn’t know where the house was until Sirius spoke. “You’ve already done it?”

Sirius nodded. "Now I just need to know who else I need to tell."

H.J. began to list everyone. "Harry, Cassandra, Xander, Luna, Nicole, Remus, Buffy, Faith, Orion, Katherine, Thomas and Mione. I think that covers everyone."

"I'd also like Craig Delaney to know where we can be found." James wanted to have a healer he trusted to be able to have access to the house.

Sirius consigned the list to memory. "What about Bella?"

"That will be fine." James agreed.

"Dad, what about Father?" Even though Harry now called James 'Dad' all of the time, he still called Severus 'Father'.

Sirius pulled a face. "Do we have to tell Snivellus?"

"Yes." James scowled at his friend. "It's Harry's house as well as mine."

Harry smiled gratefully at James. "Thanks, Dad."

"You shouldn't have to thank me, Harry." James told his son. "I'm just sorry that I didn't cast a Fidelius charm straight away."

"At least we know he can't find me now." Harry felt more relaxed now that the charm was in place.

James yawned. "I might as well ask Bodie to start breakfast. Sirius, do you want any?"

"Have I ever refused before?" Sirius followed James out. "I'll just drop home and get Faith and the kids."

Tonks lay back on the pillows. "H.J. I'm stealing your bed."

H.J. was already heading for the door with Harry. "That's alright. I'm only going to come back to get dressed after breakfast."

"Great." Tonks put down her glass, pulled up the covers, and closed her eyes. "At least I'll get some sleep in here."

H.J. raised an eyebrow at James as they set off out of the room. "And I thought you were a gentleman, James. Shame on you for keeping your wife up like that."

"Shut up, H.J." James snapped, his face burning after his wife's comment.

Sirius led the way downstairs, sniggering as he went.

Harry hesitated in the doorway. "Will you be alright alone?"

Cammie sat up. "Will you stay?"

Harry walked back into the bedroom. "You three get some sleep. I'll stay awake."

After her James' filled night, Tonks was already sleeping, and Hermione was feeling sleepy, having felt unwell during the night. Soon no noise came from the two women except for gentle breathing. Cammie crawled out from the bed, and headed over to the fire. "I don't think I'm actually going to be able to go back to sleep."

Harry got to his feet. "In that case, do you want to open a Christmas present?"

"Mum and Dad will kill me if I do." Cammie glanced over at her sleeping mother. She'd been warned by them not to open anything until they were up, as they wanted to see Cammie open her gifts, having missed out the previous year.

"This gift is from me." Harry stood up. "And I want to give it to you now."

Cammie's curiosity got the better of her. "What is it?"

Harry vanished, and returned a few moments later, placing a large square box on the small table that sat in front of the fireplace. After casting a spell to make sure that Tonks and Hermione wouldn't be disturbed, he nodded towards the gift. "Open it."

Scrambling to her feet, Cammie read the tag. "From Hugh to Mie." She grinned at Harry. "Corny!" She then examined the wrapping paper. "You can tell that a man wrapped this."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Just open it, Mie."

After tearing off the paper, Cammie lifted the lid off the box inside, and gave a little cry of delight. "Harry, it's beautiful."

Harry watched as Cammie ran a finger over the wooden carved square box inside. "I know how much you missed your chess set."

Cammie had had a hand-carved chessboard that Dominus had supplied for her. "This one is much nicer."

"Lift the board up." Harry urged.

Cammie gave her second cry of delight. "Dragons and unicorns!"

"I remembered that you said you were a big fan of both." Harry had thought long and hard about what should represent the chess pieces.

Cammie stroked a finger over a baby dragon pawn making it blow a small puff of smoke. "It's so sweet." She looked worriedly at Harry. "This must have cost you a fortune."

"Not really." Harry shrugged as he lied; the gift had totally wiped out eight months' savings.

Cammie replaced the lid and hugged Harry. "Thank you so much."

Harry resisted the temptation to move his head as Cammie's mouth found his cheek. "I'm just glad you like it."

Cammie jumped up. "I've got something for you." She too vanished before returning with one of the gifts she'd had made for Harry. "Here. It's not as good as the chess set though."

"I'm sure I'll love it." Harry took the long, slim beautifully wrapped gift, and carefully unwrapped it, before removing the lid, and taking out the gift. "And I was right."

"I didn't know what to get you, and I remembered overhearing you talking to Professor Snape, so I talked to him." Cammie had been terrified of him, more so than when she'd had to converse with Dominus.

Harry knew how frightened Cammie was of his father. "He really isn't as bad as you think."

"I know." Cammie had been surprised at how affable Severus had been when she'd explained why she had wanted to talk to him. "He's the one who sent it off for me to be sewn."

Harry ran several fingers over the soft wrap that contained many of the instruments he'd need for continuing his potions minor that Severus was now monitoring. "Is this basilisk skin?"

Cammie nodded. "Professor Snape said it lasts longer than any other material and is better at dealing with any stray ingredients that might get onto it."

It was now Harry's turn to protest. "Mie, basilisk skin is rare and expensive."

"It wasn't that much." Cammie had bought some from H.J., who hadn't wanted to charge Cammie anything, but Cammie had insisted on paying something. She'd winced at the month's allowance that H.J. had reluctantly charged her, not realizing that the amount of skin

she'd been given would have taken her five years' allowance to pay for.

"Not that much?" Harry exclaimed. "Mie, do you have any idea how much this piece of skin is worth?"

"It's a gift, Harry." Cammie reminded him. "And I really think that the value fades into insignificance when I acknowledge that you jeopardized your life for me, and as expensive as it was, it really can't measure up to that."

"You swallowed a dictionary didn't you?" Harry, realizing that he was being rude, joked lightly with Cammie.

"I might have." Cammie went with Harry's change of topic. "But it is okay, isn't it?"

"It's absolutely perfect." Harry leant forward and kissed the corner of Cammie's mouth. "Thank you, and Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas, Harry." Cammie returned his salutation as she got to her feet. "I'd best go and get dressed before Dad comes back up. I'll see you downstairs."

Harry let her go, and waited for H.J.'s return.

Later that day

James found Harry nursing a brandy. "I thought you didn't want alcohol."

"I'm not drinking because of Dominus." Harry took a tiny sip of the brandy.

James had a feeling he knew what it was bothering his son. "Harry, do you want to talk about it?"

Harry nodded miserably, and followed James into his study, immediately blurting out his fears. "Dad, I don't know what to do about Mie."

"She certainly seemed to like your gift." Cammie had set up the chess set, begging anyone who'd play to sit down with her. Only Severus, who to Sirius' chagrin, after being told about Dominus' letter had insisted on seeing his stepson, had been able to beat her.

"And I loved her gifts to me." Harry had shown James the wrap and a wallet that Cammie had also given him, when they'd sat down together after breakfast.

James knew of the Basilisk's existence, even though Harry didn't. But knowing how H.J. felt about his son, even James had been surprised by H.J.'s generosity at how much Basilisk skin he'd given Cammie at a minimal cost, so that she could have it made into gifts for her friend. "She certainly must think a great deal of you, Harry."

"But I still don't know whether she likes me just as friend or if it's something more. I wanted to tell her how I felt this morning but I couldn't do it." Harry took a bigger mouthful of the brandy, before going on. "And I know she's only fifteen, but I also know that there's no-one else I want to spend the rest of my life with."

"Harry, you're only nineteen and..." James began, only for Harry to shake his head.

"Dad, it wouldn't matter if I was a hundred and nineteen, I'd still be in love with her." Harry got up, his face stricken. "Age has nothing to do with it."

"She's the reason you broke up with Daphne isn't it?" James hadn't really talked to Harry about his abortive relationship.

"Yes, but I didn't realize it then." Harry gave a huge sigh. "I just found that I couldn't ever imagine waking up next to Daphne every day, and now I can't not imagine not ever waking up next to Mie."

James frowned at the mention of waking up to next to Mie. "You do realize that if the two of you ever get together that you can't treat her the same way you treated Daphne."

"You mean sex, don't you?" Harry's cheeks were burning as he responded to James' comment.

"I do." James said a little sternly. "Cammie is underage, Harry, and even when she's not, I can't see H.J. taking it too well if he finds out that you're sleeping with his daughter."

"I know that if I get together with Mie that it will have to be different." Harry protested.

"Harry, there's also the fact that she's your cousin." James held up a hand as Harry went to say something. "Just hear me out. I know it's legal for the two of you to date and marry but I think, if Cammie should be receptive to you, it would be better if you weren't related."

"You mean I should let you carry out the ritual, don't you?" Harry, unlike Katherine, had been hesitant to cut Lily totally off, despite what she might have done.

"If you're truly serious about Cammie, then yes I do." James placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Harry, I know you still love Lily but I believe you'll get less opposition from H.J. if you aren't related to his daughter."

Harry fell silent as he let James' words sink in. "I don't want to have to choose but..."

James interrupted him. "However, before you make a final decision, I want you to think long and hard about this. Once it's done, Harry, it can't be undone."

Harry thought about Lily and then he thought about Cammie. "I want to do it, Dad."

“I meant take a few days, Harry.” James clarified what he’d intended. “If you still feel the same way on New Year’s Eve, then Nymy and I will do the ritual.”

“Thanks Dad.” Harry hugged James briefly. “I think we’d best get back otherwise everyone will wonder where we’ve gotten to.”

New Year’s Eve

Harry looked in the mirror. “I don’t look much different.”

Tonks tilted her head as she studied his face. “You’ve got my nose now.”

Harry smiled gratefully at his stepmother. “Thanks, Tonks.”

“You’re welcome, Harry.” Tonks hugged him before brushing down her trouser suit. “I think it’s time we joined everyone.”

The group headed towards the sitting room just as Sirius walked out. “I was beginning to think you’d gotten lost.”

“Who’s here, Uncle Sirius?” Harry could hear voices coming from the room.

“Certainly not the usual crowd, given that you’re supposed to be dead.” Sirius remarked wryly. “And before you ask, Snivellus isn’t here.”

“I was hoping he’d come.” Harry was a little disappointed as he walked into the room.

Katherine made her way over to the group as they entered. “You’re late, which is a little appalling since you live here.”

“I finally did it.” Harry gave her the reason why they’d been so late. “Tonks is my new mother as well now.”

Katherine, whose eye color and vision had changed after the ritual, studied Harry as hard as Tonks had. "You don't look any different. And why did you get to keep green eyes, and I didn't?" She scowled. "And where are your glasses?"

"I don't need them anymore." Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out his glasses. "At least Dad won't have to keep on replacing them now."

Katherine scowled even more. "It's not fair."

Orion, who'd been getting drinks for him and Katherine, overheard the tail end of the conversation. "I think you look sexy in glasses, Kat."

Katherine's scowl softened a little at her husband's remark. "But I hate wearing them."

"Why don't you wear contact lenses like H.J.?" James suggested to his daughter.

Katherine shuddered. "I can't stand the thought of putting anything in my eye."

Thomas watched the small group talking, his focus on Harry Potter. He turned to Mione. "Do you think that Harry Potter looks different?"

Mione glanced over at Harry and gave him a perfunctory glance. "Not really."

Thomas couldn't put his finger on what it was about Harry that seemed different. "I'm probably just imagining things."

Mione had a theory. "Perhaps he just looks happier now that he's out from under Dominus' thumb. I'm sure that being protected by a Fidelius charm also has something to do with it."

Thomas was faintly amused, as he was aware that the Fidelius charm actually afforded the boy very little protection at all. "Perhaps you're right."

"I'm always right." Mione grinned impishly before checking her wristwatch. "We're going to have to leave soon."

Thomas checked his own wristwatch, and agreed. "As we've already said goodnight to Harry and Cassandra, we'd best bid our host and his family goodnight."

James smiled widely as the couple approached him. "You're going, aren't you?"

Thomas nodded. "I really should think more carefully before I schedule meetings for New Year's Day, but it was the only time that worked for everyone involved."

"You're off to New York, aren't you?" Harry Potter asked.

Mione nodded. "Yes, we're flying there so that we can get some sleep before Thomas has his meeting. Afterwards we're having dinner with Nathan and Michaela Bradford."

"Why don't you portkey instead of flying?" H.J. had thought they were portkeying.

"I'm not that fond of portkeying." Thomas revealed what Mione had once told Harry.

"You're not alone." H.J. shuddered as he responded.

Thomas guessed the reason behind H.J.'s dislike of portkeying. "The graveyard?"

"Yes. I've not liked that method of transportation since then." H.J. smiled tightly as he thought about the Triwizard tournament and the cup that had whisked him into a living hell. "You?"

“It gives me headaches.” Thomas revealed.

“Thomas, we really need to go.” Mione had checked the time again. She hugged H.J. and then Hermione, whispering in her ear as she did so. “Good luck with your plans.”

Hermione blushed. The subject of children had come up earlier that night when Mione had revealed that she and Thomas were thinking about adopting again. As a result, it had come out that Hermione and H.J. had decided that the time was right for them to try for a baby; news that had thrilled Cammie. “Thank you.”

Thomas put his arm around Mione, ending any further discourse between the two women. “Well, we really must be off.”

The two then vanished. H.J. rubbed his head. “I like Thomas but I wish that it still didn’t hurt like hell to shake hands with the man.”

Hermione was all concern. “Do you need anything for it?”

H.J. nodded. “Another scotch.”

Sirius grinned. “Let’s go get one.”

Hermione rolled her eyes and walked over to where Luna, Katherine and Cassandra were standing together. “Can I join you?”

Luna giggled. “I have a feeling you won’t be the last person to come over here. All of our men seem to be congregating together.”

Hermione looked around for Cammie. “Have you seen Cammie?”

Cassandra had. “She went into the conservatory with Harry Potter.”

H.J., who could hear the women’s conversation, broke away from the men and started walking past Hermione.

Hermione grabbed his arm and pulled him to one side, out of earshot of everyone else. “Don’t even think about it, H.J.”

H.J.'s mouth fell open at his wife's firm voice. "But Cammie..."

"...is fifteen, H.J." Hermione finished the sentence. "The same age as you were when you got together with Luna."

H.J. scowled. "But I wasn't four years older than her."

"What do you really think Harry is going to do, H.J.?" Hermione folded her arms across her chest. "He's hardly going to ravish her in the middle of the conservatory. Harry knows what your brother is, and what he'd do to him."

"He should be more concerned about what I'd do to him, not Harry." H.J. said bluntly as he went to head towards the conservatory once more.

"Harry James Sebastian." Hermione used H.J.'s proper first names; something she rarely did unless she was very angry or teasing him. She'd used 'Potter' the first time she'd done it and H.J. had told her he didn't see himself as a Potter anymore, and so she'd reverted to the last name he now used. "If you so much as place one toe in that conservatory you'll be sleeping in a different room for the next month."

H.J. hesitated. "You really mean that don't you?"

"Yes." Hermione confirmed. "Do not embarrass our daughter by going in there. I trust her to deal with the situation; you should do the same."

Hearing his daughter's voice coming from the direction in which the conservatory lay, H.J. glanced over Hermione's shoulder. "Cammie, what are the flowers for?"

"Tonks asked me to pick some for the table. Harry was showing me the best spots." Cammie informed her father. "I'd best go take them to her."

Hermione raised an eyebrow at her husband as the two left to find Tonks. "H.J., you really should trust Cammie."

H.J. let out a deep breath. "I know, and I'm sorry."

A few minutes later everyone headed into dinner, and afterwards readied themselves in preparation for the upcoming midnight celebration. However, before the hour had even struck eleven, the insistent vibration of the ring that Sirius wore interrupted the pleasant atmosphere. Sirius knew it must be important when, on getting to his feet, he was joined by Harry, Cassandra and H.J. "Let's go."

Even though it was breaking with protocol, Sirius firecalled, however, a few minutes later. "There's an ongoing attack on Azkaban; I'll let you know what's happening as soon as I can."

Ten minutes later, unable to stand it, Cammie jumped up and headed for the conservatory. "I'm going for a walk."

Harry Potter got up as well, stopping Hermione, who had looked pale throughout dinner. "I'll go after her." As he followed Cammie into the conservatory, Harry called out. "Don't worry, your Dad will be fine."

Cammie span around. "Harry, we all know who's attacking Azkaban although Sirius didn't mention any names." Cammie plucked a flower head between her nervous fingers. "And we all know that Dominus loathes Dad. It's the reason why he kept me alive; to punish him."

"As I've tried to tell you plenty of times, I actually think Dominus liked you." Harry told her. "He treated you better than anyone else in Castrum House, and what he did at Christmas goes a long way to proving that."

Not wanting to discuss how Dominus felt about her, Cammie changed the subject back to Azkaban. "Why do you think he's gone to Azkaban?"

"To get my mother out." Harry guessed. "I can't think of any other reason."

Cammie shivered. "At least she thinks you're dead, and is unlikely to come after you."

"You're forgetting that Dominus is aware that I'm alive, and if he knows, then so will she." Harry put an arm around Cammie's shoulders as they continued walking.

Cammie had forgotten. "She's going to blame me when she finds out the truth. It's my fault she believed you were dead, and she's going to be angry that you betrayed her for me."

Harry disagreed about Lily blaming Cammie for his 'death'. "I think she's going to blame your Uncle. He's the one who used my 'body' to help force a confession out of her. If there's anyone she's likely to go after, it's going to be him."

"That really doesn't help, Harry." Cammie rubbed her arms as she thought about her Uncle.

"Sorry." Harry stopped to hug her. "I'm sure he'll be fine."

"I hope so too." Cammie pulled free of Harry's embrace as she heard footsteps. "Has something happened?"

Xander immediately put her fears to rest. "Katherine is waiting to say goodnight to you both."

Harry was surprised to hear that his sister was leaving. "She's going home?"

Luna, who'd accompanied Xander, shook her head. "She's going to Sirius' house with Orion. Faith wants to put the children to bed there, so they're going with her to keep her company."

As the three of them walked back into the sitting room, Cammie looked around. "Has Mum gone as well?"

“She’s gone with Nymy to St. Mungo’s.” Xander told her as Cammie’s face blossomed with fear again. “Don’t worry. No-one’s been hurt but they wanted to be there just in case.”

Cammie unconsciously reached out, searching for Harry’s hand. “I wish I could go.”

“I’m sorry, Cammie but in the light of Dominus’ recent activity, your Mum said that you can’t take that chance.” Xander apologized.

Harry had felt Cammie’s hand brush against his, and he intertwined his fingers with hers. “I guess we’d better say goodnight to Katherine.”

Katherine was glad to see that her brother was taking care of the girl she still considered to be her cousin. “I told Xander that if we hear anything first, Orion or I will let you know.”

Harry hugged his sister. “And the same here.”

Katherine then headed out of the room to join Orion and Faith at Sirius’ house.

It was then that Harry realized something. “Where are Dad and Uncle Remus?”

Luna gave Harry a consolatory smile. “Harry came back to warn us that things were already going badly on Azkaban, and it could be a late night. So they left with him.”

“I have to do something.” Harry checked his wands as he spoke.

Cammie realized what Harry was planning to do. “Harry, you can’t leave here. You heard what Sirius said earlier.”

Harry shrugged. “I don’t care if I’m under house arrest. Dominus will take it out on Dad if he gets his hands on him.”

"You don't know that your Dad has gone to Azkaban; he could just have gone to the Ministry." Luna pointed out. "And you'll never get them to give you an authorized Portkey to Azkaban if he has. Everyone thinks you're dead, Harry."

"I don't need one." Harry lifted his arm that still bore the Dark Mark. "This will let me apparate to wherever Dominus is. I'm willing to bet that's how the rest of the men will be getting to the Island."

Cammie blanched. "Harry, please don't."

"I have to." Harry kissed her cheek. "I'll see you later."

Before anyone could say anything else, he vanished.

Xander sighed heavily. "Well this isn't exactly the party fest I thought tonight would be."

Buffy, who was burping a small blond baby on her shoulder, grimaced. "I don't see why Remus and James needed to go. They've got nothing to do with BritAD."

Cammie knew why they'd gone. "Uncle Harry said that they've both got clearance, Buffy. And I know that Remus has occasionally helped Sirius out before, and his werewolf attributes make him a valuable scout."

Buffy still didn't like it. "He's got a baby to think about now."

"So has Sirius." Luna reminded her. "But they both believe in putting duty first."

"Even before family?" Buffy exclaimed.

"If you were in immediate danger, then no." Xander knew Remus well enough to be able to make such an assumption. "But you're not, and Remus knows that we wouldn't let you struggle alone if anything happened to him."

“It still doesn’t provide me with much comfort.” Buffy stood up and placed Emily in the portable crib she’d brought with her. No-one said anything for a while, and Buffy found herself looking at the clock every few minutes as they waited. “This really is going to be a long night isn’t it?”

Xander nodded. “I won’t be going to bed but if anyone else wants to, go ahead.” No-one did. Xander moved to sit down on the sofa, pulling Luna onto his lap, so that her head rested on his chest.

Breaking the silence, Luna addressed Xander. “By the way, you owe me twenty galleons.”

Xander sighed dramatically before tweaking Cammie’s nose, as she’d moved to sit next to the couple for comfort. “Luna bet me that you and Harry would get together before the end of this year, and I said that you were just friends. Even though I was wrong, couldn’t you have waited at least another a few hours?”

Cammie’s mouth fell open. “We’re not together. Harry and I are just friends.”

Xander’s delight was immediately obvious as he grinned down at his wife. “It looks as though you owe me twenty galleons.”

Luna was dismayed. She’d been so sure of the couple. “How about a kiss instead?”

“You can’t buy me.” Xander held out his hand. “Pay up, Twinkie.”

Luna let her hand disappear between the two of them, and Xander gave a yelp. “Okay, woman. You’ve bought me.”

Her nerves on edge, Buffy snapped at the pair. “For goodness sake. People could be dying and you two are...” She broke off as she started to cry, setting her daughter off as well.

Luna got to her feet, and picked up the baby as Xander moved to comfort his upset friend. "I'm sorry, Buffy but this is how I deal with stress."

"I'm used to being out there, Xander." Buffy wiped her eyes. "I hate not being part of things, and I'm so afraid that something will happen to him."

Cammie passed her a glass of water, as Xander continued to comfort the blond woman. "While he's not the greatest dueler out there, Remus can take care of himself, Buffy. And he has two small blond incentives he loves to come back for."

Buffy smiled gratefully through her tears even as she told Xander the truth about her and Remus. "He doesn't feel the same way about me as I do about him, Xander."

"He loves you, Buff." Xander argued. "Or did I imagine the engagement ring on your finger?"

"You didn't." Buffy sniffled. She and Remus had gotten over their rough patch, and just after Emily's birth, he'd asked her once again to marry him. Having been taken care of by him in the months running up to the birth, Buffy had found herself falling in love again; something she'd never have thought possible. And she'd therefore agreed to marry Remus when he'd asked, the two of them setting a date for the summer.

"So don't worry about him." Xander urged. "He'll be back here before you know it."

Everyone then fell silent again as they waited for news, which came just after two a.m. when a bloody and exhausted Sirius appeared, dropping onto the sofa by a sleeping Cammie. "I need a drink."

Xander passed him a scotch. "How did it go?"

Sirius just shook his head as he knocked back the scotch and held out the empty glass again. Xander silently refilled it before handing it back. "What's happened?"

Sirius did the same again with the scotch before running a dirty hand over his face. "We lost Harry."

Next Chapter: Azkaban

Chapter 54: The Fall of Azkaban

Cammie started to cry at Sirius' news, and Luna immediately moved to comfort her. "I'm sorry, Cammie. I know how close you two were."

Sirius knew then that they'd misunderstood him. "It's not my godson we've lost, it's Harry Sebastian."

Either way, it was still a cruel blow for Cammie, and as the news sank in, Luna too began to cry. Afraid for her fiancé, Buffy stood up. "Remus?"

"He's not too badly hurt but he's in St. Mungo's, as are James and Harry Potter, and H.J." Sirius told her.

Cammie glanced up from Luna's shoulder. "Can I go to them?"

"Your Mum said that she doesn't want you out of the safety of this house." Sirius refused her even as he offered to take Buffy with him. "Buffy, you can come with me when I go back."

"I'll watch Emily." Luna wiped her tears away as she offered to care of Buffy's daughter.

Xander decided he'd better do as Harry had promised Katherine he would. "I'll walk around to your house and let Katherine and Faith know that you're alright, and what's happened."

Sirius told him he didn't need to. "I'm going there next. And as you can appreciate, I've then got to get back to the hospital. I have to oversee my people and their care, as well as dealing with informing the families of those men who didn't make it."

"How many people didn't make it?" Xander asked as Buffy kissed her daughter.

"I don't know yet. We're estimating about sixty or more of the guards that lived in Azkaban, about 250 prisoners, and over a third of my Division. " Sirius' face was grim. "H.J. was the last one to make it

back alive, and he was in bad shape. He was unconscious when he arrived but came to and told me about Harry.”

“What happened to him?” Xander guessed he’d run into Dominus but he wasn’t sure.

“My godson’s mother and Dominus did.” Sirius couldn’t help the anger in his voice. “Xander, I’d appreciate it if you and Luna could stay here with Cammie.”

As Sirius left with Buffy, a bereft Cammie excused herself to go to her room, leaving Luna alone with her husband and baby Emily, who slept on oblivious to what was happening. “What do you think happened out there?”

“I don’t know.” Xander shook his head. “I just don’t know.”

Somewhere above the Atlantic

Thomas, who by now had portkeyed back to his aircraft and had showered, could have told Xander what had happened. At the front of the aircraft, Thomas settled himself into one of the large leather seats where Regulus, whose wound had been dealt with, was already seated. “It feels better now that I’ve washed the stench of that prison off me.”

Regulus didn’t get a chance to respond as Thomas’ regular and most trusted stewardess stopped by the seats. “Can I get you anything, Mr. Seville; Mr. Black?”

“You most certainly can, Geraldine.” Thomas smiled. “I think champagne is in order.”

Regulus watched the swaying Geraldine walk away. “Do you mind if I ask her to join us?”

“Isn’t it enough you have a wife, and a mistress you’re supposed to love, without hitting on my staff?” Thomas’ voice held no censure though, as he responded.

“I don’t see what love has to do with it.” Regulus countered. “It’s a given that a pureblood has the right to see other women outside of marriage, and it’s totally common to have more than one mistress.”

“I’m well aware of that.” Thomas could see Geraldine coming back, and as she reached his chair, in deference to Regulus’ contribution that night, he made an offer. “Perhaps you’d like to join us.”

Geraldine dealt with serving Thomas and Regulus before returning with a third glass for herself. “Are congratulations in order, Mr. Seville?”

“They are.” Thomas sighed happily as he took a sip of the champagne. “Is my wife still sleeping?”

“I checked in on her about ten minutes ago.” Geraldine had found Mione was sound asleep, as Thomas had expected. “And the sleeping spell is intact but I did have to reapply it about half an hour ago.”

“Well done.” Thomas raised his glass to his stewardess. “To a very successful and most satisfying evening.”

Geraldine had guessed that things must have gone extraordinarily well when Thomas had invited her to join him, something he’d never done before. “A successful evening.” She took a sip of her champagne. “Will I be reading about it in the Prophet?”

Thomas’ smile grew wider. “I don’t doubt it.”

Regulus patted his knee. “You can sit here if you’d like. You can’t be comfortable standing there like that.”

“I’m fine standing, but thank you, Mr. Black.” Geraldine had no wish to abuse her position.

Thomas resisted the urge to roll his eyes at the unnecessary posturing. "You can sit there if you want to, Geraldine. It won't reflect badly upon you."

"Thank you, Mr. Seville, but I'd still prefer to stand." Geraldine again refused politely.

Regulus unholstered his wand and enlarged the already outsized seat. "Now please, sit down."

Geraldine finally moved to sit down. "Thank you, Mr. Black."

"You're welcome to call me Regulus." Regulus smiled at the very pretty stewardess. "And now we're all comfortable, if Thomas doesn't mind, I would like to share our victory with you."

Watching Regulus flirting with his stewardess, Thomas felt a pang that he couldn't share it with Mione. "I don't mind."

"Before I start, won't Mione remember you hitting her with a sleeping spell?" Regulus casually wrapped his arm around Geraldine's shoulders as he asked.

Thomas wondered how long his stewardess would hold out against Regulus, as she stiffened slightly before relaxing against him. "No. I took a leaf out of your book, and drugged her first."

Geraldine's eyebrows shot up into her hairline with shock at what Regulus had appeared to have done. "You drugged Mrs. Seville?"

"It was a long time ago." Regulus had no wish to dwell on his time spent with Mione, no matter how good a mood Thomas was in. "Thomas, perhaps you'd prefer to recite tonight's events."

Thomas didn't bother to hide his smile, as he knew that Regulus was trying to deflect his attention elsewhere. "Okay."

Geraldine settled herself more fully against Regulus as Thomas began. Even though it was Regulus she was seated with, and

Thomas might have been her boss, married, and the scourge of the wizarding world, Geraldine couldn't deny that she found him attractive, and particularly liked listening to what she considered to be a deep and very sexy voice.

Several hours earlier

Thomas handed Mione a glass of champagne. "I thought you'd like something to drink."

Mione smiled lovingly at Thomas. "I do." She'd barely drunk half of the champagne when she began to yawn. "Sorry." As her head tipped forward, Thomas cast a sleeping spell on his wife, and picked her up. "Geraldine."

"Sir?" The stewardess came hurrying into the cabin area.

"Please ensure my wife stays asleep." Thomas carried Mione to one of the two bedroom cabins. "And fetch my cloak and mask."

A few moments later Geraldine returned, and inclined her head. "Sir."

"I should be back in two to three hours, maybe longer." Thomas pulled his cloak on, and then transfigured his beige trousers and shirt so that they were now black and tighter fitting. "If I do not return for any reason, wake Mione up before she reaches New York and explain that I got called away."

"Yes, Sir." Geraldine had no idea what was going on, and, as it wasn't her place to ask, she was to be left wondering where Thomas was going.

Thomas vanished, reappearing at Castrum House. "Regulus, is everything in place?"

Regulus nodded. "Rupert and his teams are already on Azkaban Island, and he should have started to dismantle the wards. Everyone else is awaiting your orders."

Thomas checked the time. "Tell Lucius to dispatch all the teams in five minutes' time, and to ensure that there's at least a thirty second gap between each group so that they don't apparate in on top of each other. I'm leaving now, and I'll see you in a few minutes."

When Thomas arrived, he could see that Rupert was still working on the wards, silvery and yellow lights dancing over them creating an Aurora Borealis effect. He was surprised that no-one had come out from the prison to check what was going on. "Need help?"

Rupert was relieved to see Thomas. "I need extra power to bring down the seventh and tenth strings. No-one else here is capable of the precision I need."

Thomas aimed his wand where he'd been instructed to, and a few moments later the silvery and yellow lights became interspersed with red, violet and green sparks before a rumble shook the ground and with a huge bang, the wards around Azkaban collapsed. "It's time."

At that moment, the first team from Castrum House portkeyed in. Thomas addressed them. "Together with Logus' teams, you'll be forming the vanguard of this whole operation. Do not fail me."

As alarms began to sound throughout Azkaban as the prison finally acknowledged the breach, Thomas addressed Rupert, who'd literally collapsed. "After setting up our own wards you can leave, Logus." Thomas had reinstated his former habit of naming the Inner Circle specifically for this mission, and had named Rupert 'Philologus' but shortened it to Logus for the sake of expediency.

As Rupert set to work in establishing wards keyed to Thomas, Thomas started forward, just as the second team and Regulus arrived together. "Amicus, you're with me." As Thomas headed away from Rupert and towards Azkaban, pops began to signal the arrival of not only the next team from Castrum House but Auror Division as well.

Thomas, Regulus and his team dealt swiftly with the six Aurors that barred their path to Azkaban, and the group stepped over their bodies, as Thomas blasted his way into Azkaban. Once inside the building,

Thomas tried to apparate to Lily's side. "Her cell must be warded. No matter. We'll simply do this the hard way."

As Thomas brought down the next door that separated them from the corridor that led to their destination, guards begin to pour into it, intending to defend against the incursion. Between them, Thomas and Regulus, together with the four men that had accompanied them, began to pick off the guards. It was a testament to Thomas' power and prowess that thirty guards soon became none, with the loss of just two of his own men.

After picking off the guards that tried to stop them en-route to the higher security cells, as he'd suspected, Thomas discovered that the cells were warded separately; something he hadn't previously been made aware of by his Ministry contact. "Cover me." Thomas knew that he'd need to switch his full concentration to dropping the wards, and for a short time would be vulnerable, as he'd be unable to shield himself at the same time.

Regulus and the two men with him were also quite vulnerable in the open area, but they quickly transfigured items they were carrying to provide themselves with some measure of protection, as yet more guards and a group of Aurors began to attack them.

Thomas almost wished he hadn't left Rupert behind but he'd needed Rupert to establish his own wards, and, while Thomas knew that Rupert had easily picked up warding and had since gone onto master it, he wasn't particularly powerful, nor was he a good dueler. Forcing himself to shut out the screams and shouts coming from behind him, he began to carefully unthread the myriad of interwoven strings that made up the wards.

Regulus swore, as a slashing spell managed to get through his shield and hit him across his neck. "Avada Kedavra." The spell hit the unfortunate Auror in the stomach, his satisfaction at hitting Regulus short-lived.

Thomas was almost there when he became aware of a gurgling sound, and a body hit him as a decapitation spell struck one of the two men with Regulus. Realizing that they'd be overrun if he didn't

finish soon, he forced more power through his wand, even though he knew it would leave him more tired than he'd like to be.

A screeching sound, higher-pitched than the deep and harmonious sound of the general alarm, suddenly began to cry out, alerting the guards inside the higher security area that their supposedly unassailable citadel was about to be breached.

Thomas straightened and turned to find three guards and five Aurors still remained and were getting perilously closer, as the Death Eater who was still alive was flagging, and Regulus was struggling, bleeding and obviously in pain. "Reducto. Reducto. Reducto." Thomas let the threefold spell fly out of both of his wands, choosing to use a lower powered spell while he tried to recover from bringing down the wards. As two of the three guards fell, Regulus used the same spell to dispatch the final guard.

"I don't have time for this." Thomas again aimed both wands and sent the threefold spell forth yet again, this time blanketing the area with tiny poisonous darts. When the last of the shower of darts fell to the ground, only one Auror remained and, after deciding that discretion was a good idea, he turned tail and ran.

Regulus noticed that Thomas was actually breathing heavily, but he didn't ask how he was, knowing that Thomas wouldn't appreciate his inquiry. "From the sounds coming from behind this door, I do believe we have yet more guards to deal with when we get through it."

Thomas took several steps backwards. "Both of you get behind me."

Regulus and the Death Eater, a man named Smithers, did as they were told, shielding themselves as the door exploded into a myriad of lethal metal splinters. They needn't have worried though, as Thomas' own shield protected all three of them. However quite a few of the guards who'd taken up position behind the door weren't so lucky, and Thomas could see that the splinters had done their work.

Before they could enter the next part of the prison though, the sound of numerous footsteps came from behind them yet again, and Regulus groaned. "Are they bloody well mating or what?" He was

relieved, however, when it turned out to be Lucius and two more teams of Death Eaters.

Thomas nodded towards the gap, where spells were starting to fly out from. "Clear a path."

Lucius stepped aside as the eight men with him and poor Smithers, having little other choice, stepped through the gap Thomas had created, and into the onslaught of spells that were bombarding the group.

Thomas stood aside, using the time to recover. "How did you know?"

"I didn't but I found an Auror running through the corridors as if a Cerebus was on his heels." Lucius smirked behind his mask. "So I politely asked him what had happened."

Regulus laughed. "You mean you offered to let him live, and then killed him after telling you what you wanted to know, don't you?"

"Of course." Lucius glanced over as two men stepped out of the gap, and addressed Thomas. "They're all dead or dying, Dominus."

Thomas straightened up. "Let's go mount a rescue." He had to smile behind his mask as he stepped through the hole, as the scene before him brought to mind the Star Wars movie he'd watched with Cammie.

In contrast to the dark interior of the rest of Azkaban, the high security area was bright white, with doors flanking either side of the long corridor. Bodies littered the floor, and just as Darth Vader had, Thomas strode through the debris and up to where two other Death Eaters were holding a guard he knew to be the Custodian of Azkaban. Judging he had time, and aware he'd need to replenish the numbers that were bound to die that night, Thomas made a snap decision. "You are going to open every one of these doors."

The man refused, his voice shaking violently. "You're going to kill me if I do."

“I’m going to kill you, if you don’t.” Thomas warned.

Frightened and defeated, the man placed his hand onto the first door, and put his wand into a small round hole next to his hand. “Filius Jonas Christian Fletcher.”

Thomas noted the password the Custodian had used. “You have a son?”

The Custodian nodded warily. “Please, no matter what you do to me, don’t go after him. Jonas is only four.”

“I have no interest in children.” Thomas followed the man up the corridor, as prisoner after prisoner emerged from the cells. Thomas was impressed with the high-tech method of entrance into each cell, and, as Harry Sebastian had never shown him the memory, he had no way of knowing that Harry had been the one to recommend it, stealing the idea from a visit he’d made to his sister Auri’s former workplace in Orlando.

When he reached the cell that the metal tag on the door said contained Tom Riddle, Thomas waited for the door to be opened, and then he stepped inside. “Good evening, Tom.”

“I had a feeling I’d be seeing you again.” Tom knew who was behind the mask. “You’re here to kill me, aren’t you?”

“Unless you’d prefer to serve me.” Thomas offered.

Like Thomas, his counterpart had no wish to serve others. “No. I told you what I wanted when...”

“Avada Kedavra.” Having no intention of listening to the man who’d help him to set up his initial meeting, Thomas was already stepping outside of the cell even before the Riddle’s body hit the floor. He gestured to the Custodian. “Let’s continue.”

Finally the Custodian reached the last door. “Filius Jonas Lily Evans.”

As soon as the door opened, Lily stepped out, a self-satisfied smirk playing over her lips. "I thought I heard the doorbell."

Thomas handed her a wand, only to knock it aside as she turned it on the Custodian. "No, he gets to live."

Lily's eyes flashed but she subsided. Thomas turned to the Custodian and the happy but stunned prisoners. "Agree to serve me, and I will let you live. Refuse and your bodies will join those of your former guards."

Aware that none of them had wands, and the white and silver masked wizards surrounding them did, one by one each of the prisoners agreed to do as Thomas asked. Finally Thomas turned his attention to the Custodian. "And you?"

The Custodian thought about his son, and dropped to his knees in answer.

Even though he hadn't intended to free any prisoners except for Lily, Thomas believed in allowing for every possibility and had already planned ahead for just such an eventuality. Reaching inside his pocket, he pulled out a small velvet bag, which he unshrunk before passing it to Regulus, and then addressing the prisoners. "You will wear these rings. Should you ever fail me, then these rings will become the instruments of your death. Now follow me and bear witness to the monumental occasion of the destruction of your former prison."

Thomas pushed his way forward, Lily trotting behind him like a faithful puppy, with the prisoners moving aside so that they could pass.

Regulus handed the Custodian a ring. "Put it on." As Regulus turned to the next prisoner, the Custodian noticed the ring bore a remarkable resemblance to one he was already wearing. Quickly slipping the ring Regulus had just given him into his pocket, he acted as if he'd just put on the ring. It wasn't a moment too soon as Regulus glanced behind him, noticing the movement and, satisfied, he moved on.

On the battlefield below, Harry was stymied from using his usual fighting techniques, as most fights were literally going on hand to hand, preventing him from using blanketing spells. He knew he could have picked off the Death Eaters but he'd also bring down Aurors and he wasn't willing to take the risk.

He'd just secured two Death Eaters when he, and everyone around him, were alerted to the fact that something was happening as a strong rumbling began to pervade the ground causing some people to lose their footing, and cracking sounds began to emanate from Azkaban itself. "Crap. This can't be good."

It wasn't. Less than two minutes later a massive explosion ripped through Azkaban, sending large chunks of ebony rock flying into the air. "Merlin." Harry had known that Dominus was powerful but seeing the devastation he'd just wreaked, and Harry knew it had to be Dominus who'd caused it, even he was shocked to the core. Then as a spell whistled past his head, Harry turned his attention back to what he was doing, and he plunged into the battle once more.

Five minutes later, Sirius, who was fighting at Harry's side, caught Harry's eye. "We can't take much more of this. There are far too many of them."

"He's obviously done what he came to do." Harry yelled back. "I'll go help the wardbreakers. I've got the feeling that the wards are tied into the Dark Mark."

As Harry made his way over to where the wardbreakers were trying to bring down the warding that Rupert had erected just after Auror Division had arrived, he spotted a lone female Auror backing away from a very familiar gold-masked man, the fire that was burning close by dancing off the metallic mask. Harry immediately transformed into his wolf Animagus and began running as fast he could to bridge the gap.

Ten Minutes Earlier

Thomas stood flanked by Lucius, Regulus and Lily. Before them Azkaban rose up into the night sky. "Are you ready?"

The three of them nodded, Lily only just having been briefed on what Thomas wanted from her. Thomas holstered his spare wand; he'd only need one for what he was planning. "On my mark. Three, two, one, mark."

"Humus Labefactus Promittus." All four let the same spell fly from their wands and into the ground, moving their wands so that their single spells combined to become one. Everyone there, including Thomas, found themselves thrown to the floor as the ground began to shake violently, and tremors spread out and away from them racing towards Azkaban prison. With a massive rumble, fissures began to appear in Azkaban's walls as they began to tear themselves apart.

As Thomas climbed to his feet, he smiled, and under his breath quietly gave thanks. "Thank you, Sebastian." He'd stolen the idea from the memory of the duel he'd seen Harry give at USAD, and it was now being put to good use as the building in front of him became structurally unsound.

He then addressed the team of six Death Eaters, who'd been waiting outside of Azkaban, as he'd ordered. "The moment the next spell contacts the building, shield us."

Thomas then gave a second order to his Inner Circle. "Again, on my mark."

Once more the group aimed their wands, this time at the fissure-strewn structure in front of them. As the combined power of the explosive spell they'd cast hit Azkaban, its now weakened structure exploded like a fragile eggshell being dropped from a great height.

Thomas watched with great satisfaction as the night sky lit up, and huge chunks of debris bounced off the shield that had been erected. As the rain of debris died down, he barked out orders. "Amicus, portkey out, and get that wound looked at. I'll be joining you once I've finished here. Lily, you're with me. Argentus, issue a portkey to the prisoners, and return to oversee their arrangements. The rest of you rejoin the battle but remember that the Sebastians will be mine to finish."

Holding back frightened tears, the Custodian took hold of the rope that Lucius was using to act as a portkey, and that the Death Eater was now feeding out. Once everyone was holding onto it, Lucius also grabbed onto it, and just as he opened his mouth to speak, the Custodian let go. Moments later the area around him was empty, and in the dark the man fled to hide behind the debris that now decorated the ground.

Unaware of the man's treachery, Lily and Thomas marched down the hillside back towards the area where the fighting was still heavy. With fires from spellcasting lighting up the wand to wand battles that were still ongoing, Lily paled as she spotted a familiar figure. "It can't be."

Thomas followed Lily's gaze to where Harry Potter was engaging several of his men. "You were lied to by Sebastian, Lily. Your traitorous son is still alive and well but not for much longer."

"Please no." Lily couldn't bear to lose Harry, and she stepped in front of Thomas.

"Do you want to die in his place?" Thomas offered.

Lily didn't and, standing aside, instead she made a different plea. "Then please don't toy with him."

Thomas strode over, and ordered his men away. "Hello, Potter."

The color rushed from Harry Potter's face. "Dominus."

Thomas aimed his wand at the young man. "I told you what would happen the next time our paths crossed, Potter. Avada..."

Lily's heart was in her mouth as her son dropped to the floor trying to avoid the killing curse. As he did so, a spell came hurtling across the void and hit the ground in front of Thomas as his shield caused it to rebound off him. A voice made a demand. "Get away from my son."

Unable to return fire at Thomas due to the oath he'd sworn, Harry rolled to his feet before screaming out. "Dad, no."

Thomas sent a slashing curse at James. "You should listen to your son, Potter."

James shielded and advanced forward. "And you should get the hell away from him."

Thomas sighed and sent a blasting curse at Harry, overpowering it so that it broke through Harry's shield and sent him flying.

As James ran forward, Lily stepped into his path. "You can't interfere, James."

"Fuck you." James transformed into his Animagus form and charged a surprised Lily, who caught unawares, found herself being buffeted as the stag smashed into her, sending her flying as James moved to place himself between Thomas and his son. Once there, James changed back. "You can't have him."

"Stand aside." Thomas ordered.

"No." James refused.

"Avada Kedavra." Thomas called out as he aimed the spell at James.

James transformed yet again, the spell harmlessly passing beneath his legs as he reared up, before changing back. "Reducto."

Thomas batted the spell away as if it was a feather. "Get out of my way, Potter."

On the ground, Harry groggily lifted his head, blood pouring from the back of it, where it had contacted with a protruding rock. "Dad, just leave."

Both men ignored Harry, James trying to keep himself between his son and the man in front of him. "Confringo."

“Reducto.” Even though Thomas was powerful, he could feel the strain from using so much power that evening beginning to tell on him. But even with the handicap of less power, Thomas still outclassed James easily, and James’ shield splintered as the enhanced Reducto spell hit it, and he found himself being blasted in the chest.

Harry groaned and passed out as James landed heavily on top of him, James wrapping his arms around his son in a futile gesture of protection. Thomas strode over to them. “Accio wands.”

Harry and James’ wands literally ripped themselves out of the holsters they were secured in. Thomas crouched down over the two men. “You should have just let me have him, Potter. Not that I wouldn’t have killed you anyway.”

Instead of firing off a spell, Thomas kicked out at James to try and dislodge him from holding onto his son. “It’s over, Potter. Let go of the boy. I’ve got something special planned for him.”

“Fuck...” James struggled to get the word out, the large hole in his lungs making breathing and talking at the same time almost impossible.

“I give you two minutes at most.” Thomas estimated, seeing how blue James was beginning to turn. “I’d put you out of your misery but I’d prefer to see you struggle for every last ounce of breath.”

Given hope by Thomas’ words that he wasn’t going to kill her son after all, Lily came to stand by Thomas’ side. “Enjoy the afterlife, darling.”

James made a supreme effort for one final word for his ex-wife. “Bitch.”

“Ouch, that hurts.” Lily sneered. “You...” Suddenly her words ended with a scream as a spell hit her in the side, and she collapsed to the ground.

As Thomas span round he found himself face to face with a white-faced and obviously terrified Auror. "Now exactly who were you aiming at, little girl?"

"Y..Y...You" The Auror's voice came out as a squeak, her hand shaking as she tried to hold her wand on Thomas. When she'd aimed at Thomas in the dim firelit area, she hadn't realized two things. One, who he was, and two, that despite the fact that he had had his back to her, his shield was very much in operation, causing the spell to ricochet and hit Lily instead, who in her delight at seeing James fall, hadn't bothered shielding herself.

Thomas shook his head. "Silly, silly girl."

The Auror started to back away. "Please no."

"Please no." Thomas mocked her in a high pitched voice.

To the right, H.J. noticed what was happening, and swung round sending a spell at Thomas.

His attention now fully back on his surroundings, Thomas reinforced his shield against H.J.'s spell, as he aimed at the Auror at the same time.

"I don't want to die." With green light heading her way, the Auror screamed out just as a large wolf cannoned into her.

Harry changed back as he rolled off her. "Get out of here, Sherrington." Needing no second order, the girl ran.

Thomas let her go, the prey he'd been looking for now capturing his attention. "Sebastian, what a pleasure."

"I can't say likewise." Harry began to circle towards where James and Harry Potter were lying together. "Sectumsempra."

“Argentum Pectus”. Batting away Harry's slicing curse, Thomas wasn't surprised when Harry neutralized his own silver infused spell in ice, before returning fire with a heart-stopping curse.

Harry had to shield as his own spell rebounded back at him when Thomas successfully shielded against it, and then followed up by sending three Reducto spells at Harry in quick succession. Batting away spell after spell and needing some sort of distraction, Harry used a spell that would encompass both him and Thomas. “Tempestas Imber Ter.”

The two men now found themselves in the middle of a raging storm, lightning striking the ground between them. Harry made the most of the momentary blinding distraction to help the Potters. “Medicus Instanter James Potter.”

Even though Rupert had warded the Island, Harry was aware that Harry Potter's Dark Mark would give both him and James protected passage through the wards, transporting them both safely to St. Mungo's via the ring that James was wearing.

H.J. by now had managed to reach Harry's side, and he lined up with him to face off against Thomas, rain running down his face. “Toxicum Talum.”

As the little darts headed towards Thomas, at the same time Harry used a simple spell which, if it connected, would blind Thomas. “Caecus.”

Thomas easily dealt with both spells with just one wand, before returning fire at Harry with the other. “Protractus Crucio Mortis.”

“Fuck.” Harry used his speed to avoid the curse that would provide Harry with a slow and painful death, and, which he knew would simply penetrate his shield like a knife through butter. He used the word again as H.J. went down, not from a hit from Thomas but from Lily who'd regained consciousness from Sherrington's assault on her, and was now back on her feet.

Lily ended the vicious thunderstorm and joined with Thomas in circling Harry as he regained his footing. "You were right, Sebastian, I should have killed you the night I had the chance."

As Lily was speaking, the wards finally collapsed, and, feeling his ring vibrate violently, Harry screamed at his brother. "H.J. portkey out." All around them pops sounded as Aurors vanished, Sirius having used the wards' collapse to signal a retreat.

When H.J. didn't move, Harry realized that he was unconscious. "Medicus Instante..." He didn't get any further as his attention was caught up again by Thomas firing off yet another Reducto spell at him.

It was then that Harry became aware that Thomas was tired as the spell almost fizzled out on Harry's shield rather than exploding against it, and he redoubled his efforts sending the same spell at both Lily and Thomas. "Avada Kedavra. Avada Kedavra."

Lily apparated out of the way, but exhausted physically as well as magically, Thomas only just managed to avoid the spell by twisting sideways, a hole in his cloak evidence of exactly how close Harry had just come to killing him.

H.J. groaned, and Harry screamed out once more. "Medicus Instante H.J..." Harry's words died away as a familiar sensation rippled over him. He guessed that whoever Thomas had gotten to erect his wards, had not only helped to delay their own wardbreakers but had also ensured that Thomas' own wards were re-established so quickly. Harry just hoped that all of the Aurors had gotten out in the short space of time they'd had.

Thomas laughed victoriously. He guessed that Lucius had obviously ordered Rupert to return to the Island in case of any trouble. "I think you might have a teensy problem, Sebastian."

Harry was aware of the truth in Thomas' words, as all around him white-masked individuals, now freed from fighting against Auror Division, began to move in on the small group. Thomas called out. "If you want to live, do not interfere." At Thomas' words, the Death Eaters put away their wands and stood to watch the drama unfold.

As Thomas had snapped out the command to his men, Harry aimed at him again. "Avada Kedavra."

Thomas avoided the spell once more, and, with his magical reserves almost depleted, unexpectedly changed into his Animagus form.

Caught off guard, Harry had just enough time to change himself as Thomas' full weight hit him.

Lily turned away, and manually disarmed H.J. who was now starting to come round. When he opened his eyes, he discovered an amused Lily standing over him. "Hello, Sebastian."

As the two animals engaged in a vicious fight for supremacy, Lily knelt down, putting all of her weight onto H.J.'s stomach wound, making him cry out. "Did I hurt you?"

While unarmed, H.J. was still more than capable of defending himself, and he lashed out at Lily, knocking her off him.

"You punched me." Lily raised a shaking hand to her face, her voice disbelieving. "You punched me."

A few sniggers could be heard; Lily wasn't exactly popular and the Death Eaters who'd made them were aware that Lily wouldn't be able to determine who'd made them in the firelit darkness.

H.J. grinned at the sounds as he attempted to get to his feet. Knowing he was going to die anyway, he couldn't resist making a smart-mouthed comment. "What did you expect, Lily? Flowers and dinner?"

Lily's face, which now sported a split eye that was rapidly closing, turned ugly as she turned H.J.'s own wand on him. "You are going to pay for that. Crucio."

H.J.'s efforts to get to his feet were undone as the spell forced him to the floor, his back arching as he felt the weight of Lily's hatred for him

translated into pain. Suddenly the pain ended as a loud yelp rent the air.

Lily's attention had been drawn back to the two animals by the noise of an animal in pain as she turned to see which of the two had made the sound. It had been Harry. By far the larger of the two, Thomas had not only damaged Harry's leg, but he'd just also ripped a large chunk of Harry's flesh from his chest, which had made Harry cry out and falter. Thomas changed back into his usual form and turned his back on Harry. "He's all yours, Lily."

H.J. rolled over in time to hear Lily locking Harry in his Animagus form before using the cutting curse on his brother. "Harry!"

"Is going to die." Thomas unholstered his wand again, his reserves now at a stage where he'd only be able to perform some minor spells by literally draining himself. While Thomas knew that he'd pay for it later, he didn't care.

"If you're going to kill me, then get on with it." H.J. snarled as Harry yelped again.

Thomas folded his arms, his wand resting lightly against his shoulder, savoring the fact that there was nothing H.J. could do. "Tell me, H.J. How does it feel to know that you've all failed? Potter can't raise a wand against me; Harry's about to die; and as for you, if you can stand to face me in future it will be something of a miracle. But more about that in a minute. Right now I want to enjoy this moment."

H.J. had little choice but to watch as the fire that was still blazing to the right of the group highlighted Lily as she brought the slashing curse down on Harry again and again, driving the wolf back towards the cliff that H.J. knew lay behind his brother. "Harry, behind you."

Thomas didn't attempt to stop H.J. from calling out as it merely added to his amusement. "You'd better tell him your goodbyes now, H.J. I doubt he has much longer left."

Lily laughed mockingly as she realized how close to the cliff she'd now forced Harry to get. "I hope you know how to fly, Sebastian." She then hit Harry with one final spell. "Confringo."

H.J. screamed out Harry's name as the wolf gave a loud yelp of pain as the blasting spell hit it, sending it flying over the cliff.

Thomas walked over to the cliff edge, using a lighthouse spell to sweep the area below the cliff for any sign of Harry. After a few minutes he was satisfied, and walked back to rejoin Lily, who was once again standing over H.J.

Thomas grabbed her face and looked at the mess her eye was in. "You should go, Lily. If that isn't treated soon, it will scar."

Lily refused. "I'd like to stay and watch him die first."

Thomas knew he was going to disappoint her. "I'm not killing him."

Both Lily and H.J. could barely believe their ears. Lily turned on Thomas. "But he tried to kill you."

"And he failed." Thomas knew that Lily was referring to the incident in the Death Chamber. "But you did cause me considerable pain, H.J. Something I'm about to reciprocate. Lily, the Cruciatus please." Thomas knew he'd be unable to perform it if he wanted to use his meagre reserves to curse H.J. with something special he had planned for him.

H.J. tried to relax as much as possible as Lily used Thomas' favorite spell on him. However, H.J. gave it up after a short time, his body arching with the pain as he screamed. Blood once more began to issue from H.J.'s stomach wound as he contorted in agony.

Thomas held up his hand, signalling the end of the attack. "Now I'd better get on with what I've got planned for you before you bleed to death."

H.J. found himself petrified from the neck down, flipped onto his stomach, and his trousers vanishing. "What the fuck?"

Thomas knelt down beside him. "I think that half of the fun in carrying out things like this, is the anticipation of the person I'm doing this to having no idea about what I'm about to do to them."

Having a feeling that he wasn't going to like it, H.J. snarled mockingly at Thomas. "Don't tell me, you're going to torture me."

"Call it what you will. I do know that I'm going to make you scream." Thomas withdrew a knife from his cloak. "I didn't expect to get the chance to use this tonight but I like to be prepared."

Twisting his head and spotting the knife, H.J. swallowed hard. "I thought you said you weren't going to kill me."

"I'm not." Thomas examined H.J.'s leg. "Do you know how exquisitely painful it is when your arm is amputated by a blade?"

H.J. thought his heart was going to jump out of his chest as he felt the blade being drawn lightly across his leg. "You're going to cut off my leg?"

"Nothing so pedestrian." Thomas found the spot he was after. "But I am going to do a little surgery."

H.J. couldn't stop the tears or the screams that Thomas wrung out of him, as he forced the knife deep into H.J.'s leg before drawing it through muscle, tendon and skin.

As he finished, Thomas got back up. "Hurts doesn't it, Sebastian?"

"Fuck you." H.J. managed to grind out as he sobbed from the pain.

"I told you I doubted you'd ever stand up against me again. And just so you know, the knife is enchanted so that even though the wound will heal eventually, the damage the knife caused will be permanent." Thomas took great delight in telling him what to expect. "As is the pain."

H.J. found himself flipped back over, more screams being wrung out of him as his damaged leg protested the rough treatment. “Just fucking kill me.”

“I’m not giving you the luxury of dying.” Thomas aimed his wand again. “Infecundus Aeternus Thomas Seville Concateno H.J. Sebastian.”

“No.” H.J.’s voice reflected the total despair he was feeling as the spell hit him.

“Give your Mudblood wife my regards.” Thomas turned to Lily. “You’ve got two minutes to play with him but don’t kill him.”

When Lily had finished, leaving H.J. barely conscious, Thomas instructed Rupert, who by then had joined them, to dispel the wards, before Thomas uttered the complete phrase that Harry had been unable to. “Medicus Instanter H.J. Sebastian.”

As H.J. vanished, Thomas ordered the spectators to leave. He then addressed Lily. “Return to Castrum House, get your wound looked at, and then celebrate. I intend to.”

Lily bowed low and vanished.

Present Time

As Thomas finished his recitation, Geraldine gave Thomas a bright smile as he expected. “Thank you for telling me about it, Mr. Seville. Although I’m not sure I’d have wanted to visit Azkaban under those circumstances as I’m not exactly a good dueler.”

“I doubt Azkaban will be having too many visitors in the near future, not unless they’re interested in ruins.” Thomas smirked. “And while you may not be a good dueler, you are good at your job.”

Geraldine hurriedly got to her feet, as she remembered her position. “I’d best get back to work.”

Thomas shook his head. "I didn't intend that as a hint. But I would like some more champagne. After that you're free until we're due to land."

Geraldine returned with a second bottle. "If you'll both excuse me then."

Regulus got up. "Thomas, do you mind if I excuse myself as well?"

This time Thomas did roll his eyes as he knew how Regulus was anticipating spending the remainder of the flight. "Please make sure you use a silencing spell."

Grinning, Regulus disappeared in the direction of the galley, reappearing a few minutes later with Geraldine in tow, and a bottle of champagne in his hand. He disappeared again as he opened the door to the other bedroom, pulling a blushing Geraldine in behind him.

Despite his earlier words, Thomas didn't really mind, and he settled back to savor the peace and his victory as well as to recover strength. His lips curved into a self-satisfied smile as he closed his eyes and summed up the results of the day. "And then there were none."

With H.J. crippled, Harry dead and Harry Potter unable to raise a wand against him, Thomas couldn't really see anyone to stand against him, prophecies or no prophecies.

Next Chapter: Aftermath

Chapter 55: An Unhappy New Year

St. Mungo's – 1st January 2006

H.J. opened his eyes to find Hermione sitting beside him. "This feels horribly familiar."

Hermione had been warned by Craig that H.J. would be in severe pain when he awoke, and she was therefore ready with a potion. "H.J. take this."

H.J. didn't argue, and let his wife help him drink the potion, before grimacing. "At least it takes the worst of the pain away."

A tear ran down Hermione's cheek, following the path of the many that she'd already shed during the night. "I'm afraid that's all it will ever do."

H.J. could tell that there was more. "Hermione, you may as well tell me."

"You're never going to be able to walk on your injured leg." Hermione wiped away the tear angrily, annoyed at herself for crying when it was her husband who was suffering.

"Dominus took great delight in telling me that what he did would be permanent." H.J. didn't know how he was going to break the rest of the news to his wife about what Dominus had done to him. "Hermione, my leg isn't the only injury, or should I say curse, that he inflicted on me that's permanent."

"Craig didn't mention anything else." Hermione's face reflected her bewilderment.

"That's because it wouldn't have shown up as an injury." H.J. lifted his hand to touch his wife's face. "Hermione, I'm so sorry."

"H.J., you're frightening me." Hermione could see the desolation in H.J.'s face. "Please just tell me."

“He took away my ability to father children, and he locked in the spell so that only he can remove it.” H.J. couldn’t bear to look at his wife’s face as he told her. When he eventually did, he was completely stunned to see that Hermione was smiling triumphantly. “Hermione?”

“He was a little too late.” Hermione placed H.J.’s hand on her stomach. “Not only do we have Cammie, but I’m also carrying your child. It’s too early though to determine whether it’s a boy or a girl.”

It was almost too much for H.J. to deal with, and he fought not to break down. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I only found out during the night.” Hermione was glad she had some good news for H.J. as the remainder of what she had to tell him was anything but that. “I’ve been feeling off color all through Christmas.”

“You should have told me.” H.J. reverently stroked his wife’s stomach.

“I know but I didn’t say anything as I didn’t want to spoil Christmas for you and Cammie.” Hermione explained why she hadn’t said anything. “Anyway, when Craig was looking you over, he noticed how pale I was, and he checked me over. He told me that I had acid reflux disease, and also that I was about three weeks pregnant.”

H.J. forgot about his own woes as he turned a worried eye on Hermione. “Shouldn’t you be lying down or something?”

Hermione gave a small laugh. “H.J., I’m barely pregnant and have a little heartburn; I’m not sick. I wouldn’t have even found out yet about my pregnancy if I hadn’t been feeling so stressed out which caused the reflux disease. Something I need to try and avoid now I’m expecting.”

“I can’t believe I’m going to be a dad again.” H.J. smiled up at his wife. “Harry will...” It was then that it hit him about his brother. “I can’t believe I didn’t ask about Harry. Did they find him?”

Hermione tears began again. "H.J., I'm so sorry, but Harry's gone."

"Gone?" H.J. had hoped that Harry had survived the fall but it looked as though those hopes had been dashed.

"Yes." Hermione didn't attempt to stop her tears as she told him. "They haven't recovered his b.. him yet though."

"But that means that there's still a chance he survived." H.J. clung to one final hope.

Which Hermione dashed. "Sirius said that the cliff you saw Harry go over was more than two hundred feet high, H.J. If the fall didn't kill him, then the rocks at the bottom in the ocean would have."

"How did Sirius know?" H.J. had believed he and Harry were the final two Aurors left alive on Azkaban when Dominus had attacked them.

"You were drifting in and out of consciousness when you appeared here at St. Mungo's. You told us what had happened, even though you obviously don't remember." Hermione explained.

"The last thing I remember was Lily putting me under the Cruciatus yet again, before I thankfully blacked out." H.J. realized that he had no idea of how he'd reached St. Mungo's. "How did I get here?"

"Your Auror medical portkey." Hermione wondered who could have operated it, if H.J. hadn't. "If you didn't set it off, who did?"

"He did it." H.J. deduced. "I'm willing to bet I wouldn't have survived the night if he hadn't."

"You wouldn't have." Hermione informed him of what Craig had told her. "You'd lost so much blood from your stomach wound. But why would Dominus want you to survive?"

H.J. told her what Dominus had said, before returning to the subject of Harry. "I need to go back to Azkaban. I've got to find Harry."

"You're going nowhere." Hermione said firmly. "And you've got to face the truth, H.J. Harry is gone." Her sternness vanished as she started to cry again. "He was the first person in authority at Hogwarts to ever be nice to me, and now I'll never see him again."

"Come here." H.J. moved his hand from Hermione's stomach to lift it up so that she could lie next to him.

"I can't." Hermione sobbed. "I'll hurt you."

"I don't care." H.J. grabbed her hand and tugged, so that she was propelled forward. "Just as I don't care what everyone thinks about Harry. I don't believe it. I've lost too many people I love and care about, and I'm not giving up on him until I see proof otherwise."

As Hermione sobbed against him, she wished that her husband would just accept the news; otherwise she was afraid it would be even harder on him when the proof was found. "H.J., it's not going to be like Cammie. He's gone; let him go."

"I can't." H.J. then fell silent as he comforted his wife.

At BritAd Cassandra was having a similar conversation with Sirius. "I don't want to talk about it, Dad. Harry's not dead. I'd know if he was." She picked up her cloak. "I'm going back to Azkaban."

Sirius stopped her. "Cassie, it doesn't matter if you do go back. Harry was blasted off a two hundred foot high cliff in Animagus form. There's no way he'd have survived that fall. You can't just ignore what happened because you don't want to believe the truth."

Cassandra turned on her father. "What would you rather I do, Dad? Just give up on him?"

“No but you’ve got to be realistic.” Sirius didn’t want Cassandra hoping day after day that there would be a miracle and Harry would suddenly reappear.

Unaware of the eyes of the Aurors around her, Cassandra snarled at her father. “Realistic isn’t giving up on a man when he’s only been gone for twelve fucking hours.”

Sirius, on the other hand, was very much aware that they were being scrutinized, and even with the circumstances being as dire as they were, he knew he couldn’t allow his daughter to get away with her language. “Auror Black, being realistic is about knowing when to give up. I’ve had four squadrons searching the coastline ever since H.J. came in and told me what happened. And despite their best efforts, the squadrons have found nothing. We’re undermanned as it is, and I do not have the resources nor the time to spend searching for just one man, no matter who he is. And even though I understand you’re upset, you still have a job to do. Is that clear?”

Cassandra wanted to scream at her father that even if he didn’t care about Harry, she did. Instead she gritted her teeth. “Yes, Sir.”

“Now I suggest you report to Auror Nero in Diagon Alley.” Sirius had doubled the guards who usually patrolled the streets, worried that Dominus might look to add to his victory at Azkaban. “And when you finish there, you’ll report to the night desk.”

“Yes, Sir.” Cassandra managed to bite out, before turning on her heel and stalking furiously out of the room.

Sirius pointed to the three Aurors who’d been stupid enough to make it obvious that they’d been eavesdropping. “You, you, and you follow her. And Jones, you’re on the night desk tonight as well, and you and you will be on it tomorrow. Now get out.”

Unluckily for one of the Aurors, instead of apparating as he normally did, Sirius walked out right behind them, and managed to catch the tail-end of what she was saying. “Vettriano.”

“Sir?” The unfortunate Auror turned around.

“Would you care to repeat what you just said?” Sirius had to fight to keep his anger at bay.

“No, Sir.” Vetriciano knew she’d been caught. “I’m sorry, Sir.”

“If I ever catch you or anyone else calling Auror Sebastian a sadist again, they will find themselves out of a job.” Sirius snapped. “As it is, starting tomorrow you’re on night desk for a month, cleaning duty for two, and I’m docking three months’ wages.”

Vetriciano was in tears. “I really am sorry, Sir. I didn’t think.”

Her apology just incensed Sirius even more. “You’re damn right you didn’t think.” Sirius resisted the urge to prod the girl in the chest as he spoke. “And just so we’re clear on this point, I may have called off the search for Auror Sebastian, but, contrary to what you’ve just said, girl, I am not glad to get Auror Sebastian out of my hair. Even dead, he’s a better Auror than you’ll ever be. Now get out of my sight before I change my mind and fire you anyway.”

A polite cough made Sirius aware that someone was behind him. He snapped out a response. “This had better be important.”

“It is, Sir.” Julianne Solace, whose medical condition made it impossible for her to be in the field, held out a folded piece of parchment. “It’s an urgent communique. It just came in for you from the guard that’s been dispatched to Azkaban Island.”

Sirius unfolded the parchment and read it. “Come with me.”

Julianne found herself on Azkaban a few minutes later, and she shivered as she looked round. “Oh Merlin.”

Even though they had now all been covered by sheets, Sirius could see that the bodies that still remained after the battle were visibly upsetting her. “They’re mostly Death Eaters, Solace.”

“How many did we lose, Sir?” Julianne forced herself to calm down, as she shakily asked the question.

Sirius gave her the latest numbers he'd received from St. Mungo's fifteen minutes earlier. “Not including the guards and prisoners killed when Azkaban was destroyed, there are forty dead, twelve critically wounded, thirty-five seriously injured and seventy-three walking wounded.” He glanced over at the cliff to the left of him. “And one missing in action.”

Julianne followed his gaze. “I can't believe he's gone. And for what it's worth, I'm sorry, Sir.”

“Thank you, Solace.” Sirius' voice caught, and he fell silent as they made their way across to the makeshift building that was serving as an operations center. “At ease.” Sirius ordered as the six men in the building saluted him. “Where is he?”

“This way, Sir.” Alasdair Moody led the way. “Solace.”

“Sir.” Julianne wondered why Sirius had brought her with him. She soon found out as they entered the room. A sobbing man was curled up on a bed.

“Have you been able to get anything out of him?” Sirius asked, keeping his voice low.

Moody shook his head. “As I said in the note, we found him among the ruins, huddled up and crying, saying something about his son. He still hasn't stopped crying, and he's refused to take a calming potion. As you can see, he was the Custodian of the prison.”

Sirius gave Julianne a pointed look, and she headed over to the man, placing a hand on his shoulder. He immediately veered away from her. “I'm not going to hurt you. My name's Julianne.”

The man ignored her, but Julianne persevered, using logic to figure out exactly what had frightened him. “I've had to face Death Eaters myself, and I know how frightening they can be.”

The man responded to the gentle female tone, tears still falling down his cheeks. "My son."

"Did they threaten your son?" Julianne pressed, now that she'd gotten an initial response from him.

"I was supposed to serve him." The man began to sob harder again. "But I ran, and I'm afraid for my boy. He knows about my boy."

Working out what was wrong, Sirius immediately turned to Alasdair. "Get two Aurors to bring his family into protective custody."

Julianne meanwhile continued to question the man. "You're talking about serving Dominus, the gold-masked leader, aren't you?"

The Custodian nodded. "I thought he'd kill me."

"Why didn't he?" Julianne slipped onto the bed beside the man as he wrapped his arms protectively around his legs.

"I... I'm so ashamed." The Custodian's head drooped visibly. "I let them out."

"What's your name?" Julianne changed tack for a moment.

"William Tracery." The man didn't look at Julianne as he told her, before going on unbidden. "I didn't want to die, so I let them all out."

"How many did you let out, William?" Julianne was aware of Sirius' scrutiny in the background while she questioned the man.

"Nineteen." William gave a tiny sob. "They all joined him, except for the one he killed."

Julianne placed a hand over his. "I think you should take a calming potion, William. It will help."

William finally agreed and Sirius left, before returning a few moments later, a tube of the violet potion in his hand. He handed it to Julianne as the man visibly shied away from him.

Julianne uncorked it. "Drink this, William."

William swallowed it, and then placed the vial onto the bed beside him. "I'm sorry."

"It's alright." Julianne replaced her hand over his. "You've had a horrible shock, and we all deal with these kind of things differently, William."

"It's Will." Will corrected now that he was thinking straighter. "I suppose you need to know what happened." He now felt able to meet Sirius' gaze. "Commander Black, I'm sorry about what I've done."

"I doubt you had much choice." Sirius moved to sit on the edge of the table opposite the bed which had been transfigured from a chair. "Can you tell me exactly what happened?"

Will nodded. "The wards fell, and my men and I tried to defend against the Death Eaters but they killed everyone except for me. When Dominus, I think you called him..." He glanced at Julianne who smiled and nodded. "... told me he'd kill me if I didn't help him open the cells, I did as he said. He killed one of the prisoners, Riddle. He appeared to know him."

Sirius didn't comment on what Will had said. "Go on."

"The last cell contained Evans. She would have killed me but he stopped her. After that, we all agreed to serve him, and one of the men in a silver mask gave us these to put on." The man fished in his pocket, and pulled out a silver ring and handed it to Julianne, who rolled it over in her hand.

Sirius held out his own hand and Julianne passed it to him. "You didn't have to put it on?"

"I was supposed to but my ring is pretty similar and I faked slipping it on." Will held out his hand to show off his own ring.

"Can you describe the man's silver mask for me?" Sirius wondered if it was the ubiquitous Teach he'd ran into.

His suspicion was confirmed as the man described the mask to a tee. "Dominus called him Amicus, and there was another man with a similar silver mask he called Argentus."

Sirius realized that Dominus had gone back to his old modus operandi of naming the Inner Circle, and he wondered who had had the dubious honor of being christened with his counterpart's name, and who Argentus was. "Do you know how he destroyed Azkaban?"

"He did it with the help of Argentus, Amicus, and Evans." Will then explained exactly how they'd done it. "Afterwards, Argentus had a portkey which was a rope. I released it just as he spoke the activation word before running and hiding." He dropped his head again. "I was a coward."

Sirius believed differently. "If he'd seen you again, he'd have killed you for definite."

Suddenly Will remembered the other remark Thomas had made. "Dominus mentioned something about the Sebastians being his to finish." Will saw a sad look cross Julianne's face. "Did he get them?"

Sirius reluctantly nodded. "He killed one of them and seriously injured the other."

"I'm sorry." Will apologized yet again.

"It wasn't your fault." Sirius turned as the door opened and Alasdair came in. "Are they in custody?"

Alasdair nodded. "Your boy's quite safe now, laddie."

Will's face showed his relief. "Thank you."

“Was it just the boy?” Sirius checked.

Will nodded. “His mother died when he was born. Jonas is all I’ve got.”

Julianne could see that Will obviously doted on his son. “Who looks after him?”

“His nanny, Edwina.” Will turned a worried glance to Alasdair as he realized he’d forgotten about her in his concern for Jonas.

“She’s safe as well.” Alasdair confirmed. “Now why don’t we get you back to BritAd and get a copy of your memory now that you obviously feel better.”

“ But I’ve just told you what happened.” Will’s face became concerned yet again. “Don’t you believe me?”

Julianne got up. “We do but in situations such as these, it’s more cathartic to talk things through with people, rather than just to take a copy of their memory.”

Will hadn’t thought of that. “I’ll be happy to provide you with my memory then.”

Julianne addressed Sirius. “Am I dismissed, Sir?”

“ Escort Will back to BritAD and deal with getting his memory, Solace.” Sirius ordered. “Then you can arrange for temporary accommodation for him and his family until we set up a Fidelius on their house.”

“They can stay with me, Sir.” Julianne immediately offered, having plenty of room in her house. “The Fidelius is still in effect there, so I’ll need you to do the necessary.”

Sirius, as the secret-keeper of Julianne’s property, told Will where she could be found. “Thank you, Solace.”

“Sir.” Julianne led Will out. “This way.”

Will noticed that she was limping slightly. “Were you injured last night?”

Julianne shook her head. “I had a previous run-in with Dominus and it left me permanently injured. I usually only perform desk duty; normally at night when it’s quiet as I’m no longer considered fit to be in the field.”

“Is that why your house is under the Fidelius?” As Julianne had on her way in, Will tried not to look at the bodies as they made their way back to the newly appointed apparition and portkey point.

“Not exactly.” Julianne took out her portkey. “I was involved briefly with Auror Sebastian, and as you might have guessed from what’s happened to him, he was at the top of Dominus’ hit list.”

“Which opened you up to his scrutiny as well.” Will deduced. “Was it Harry he killed?”

Julianne was aware that as the Custodian of Azkaban, Will knew Harry. “Yes.” She didn’t bother to tell him that it had actually been Lily Evans who had killed him. “Hold on.”

Will gave Azkaban one last glance before disappearing off the Island for the last time.

8 January 2006

H.J. sat nervously at the table, Hermione standing at his side, her hand a comforting presence on his shoulder. “Are you sure you did the potion correctly?”

Understanding why H.J. was asking, Mione, who was dressed in black, didn’t snap at him. “I’m sure, H.J.”

Xander got up. "I should leave you guys alone to do this. It's not as if I'm family."

Feeling obliged to follow Xander's lead, Thomas too got to his feet. "So should I."

Luna disagreed. "We're all family, and we all should be here."

Mione too thought the same. "I need you, Thomas."

"Then I'll stay." Thomas moved to stand behind his wife, placing a hand on her shoulder, which she reached up to grab.

Their argument of several days ago long forgotten, Sirius whispered softly to his daughter. "Cassie, are you sure you want to be here?"

"I have to." Cassandra didn't look at her father, instead keeping her eyes glued to the parchment that lay on the table.

Mione handed the vial of potion to H.J. "You're the only true blood relative here, so you have to do it."

Cammie grasped Harry Potter's hand tightly, and whispered to him. "I'm frightened, Harry."

"I know." Harry pulled Cammie to stand against him.

Katherine shared a worried look with her brother, and she too whispered to him. "It isn't your fault, Harry."

"Yes, it is Katherine." Harry whispered back as H.J. uncorked the potion. "I'm the reason that both Dad and Harry had to deal with Mum and Dominus at all."

"You heard what Uncle Sirius said." Katherine glanced at H.J. who had just drawn his wand out. "Dominus said he was going after Harry and H.J. You had nothing to do with it."

“Believe that if you want to.” Harry turned his attention back to H.J. “Now I think we’d better shut up.”

“Revealus Familia.” H.J. dropped the potion onto the paper at the same time as he cast the spell.

Everyone watched as names began to appear on the parchment, outlined in red if the person was living, and black if they were dead. H.J.’s current and former name were both outlined in both. “It must be because I have Jamie Potter’s body.”

Finally the name they’d been waiting for appeared. Harrison Sebastian appeared with Harold Remus Lupin-Potter in brackets next to it. Both names were outlined in black.

With a wail, Cassandra collapsed, Sirius catching her before she hit the floor. “I’m taking her home.” Sirius’ face was pale as he vanished with his daughter.

Thomas pulled Mione into his arms as she started to weep, feeling guilty not at letting Lily kill Harry, but at his wife’s distress over his death. “Let’s go home.”

Mione shook her head. “I don’t want to.”

At the end of the table, Hermione climbed onto H.J.’s lap so that she could hold him against her, knowing he’d find it difficult to stand. “I hoped it wouldn’t come to this.”

“I was so sure he wasn’t dead.” H.J.’s voice was shaking. “I kept thinking they’d find him.”

“I’m so very sorry.” Harry Potter apologized once more as he slipped his spare arm around his sister who was crying; Orion having agreed to sit with Tonks at the hospital and keep a vigil at a still seriously ill James’ bedside. “I should never have gone.”

“You did what I would have done.” H.J. assured him. “What Katherine said was right. Dominus was after our blood no matter who was there.”

“But...” Harry protested.

Thomas intervened. “H.J. is correct. Dominus knew Harry would be there that night, and he made sure that he wouldn’t bother him again. He also nearly killed you and your father for your troubles. I think you’ve punished yourself enough but if it makes you feel better, then keep it up. Either way, it’s not bringing Harry back.”

“Thomas!” Mione protested. “Don’t you think that’s a little harsh?”

Luna didn’t. “Thomas is right, Mione. Harry can keep on blaming himself but at the end of the day it won’t change things. Our friend is gone, and there are just two people to blame for it, Lily and Dominus.”

Xander’s face wore a bewildered expression. “Even after what they did to him, I still expected him to make it. After everything’s Harry’s gone through, I pretty much thought he was like Superman.”

“I thought the same.” Cammie had read enough of Xander’s comics to know what he was going on about. “But Dominus was Uncle Harry’s Kryptonite.” She could see that most of them had no idea what she was talking about. “His Achilles’ heel.”

Remus disagreed. “You’re wrong. Harry’s Kryptonite was that he cared too much about others.”

“You can’t care too much about others.” Luna argued. “You’d be like Dominus otherwise.”

“Then perhaps Harry should have been like him.” Thomas argued.

“I’d rather he was dead than be like him.” Mione wiped her tears away. “And I know Harry would feel the same way.”

Luna smiled sympathetically at Thomas, misunderstanding the hurt look that she'd seen flicker across his face. "Mione's correct, Thomas. And as hard it is to face up to the fact that Harry's gone, at least he went out fighting for what is right."

Cammie pulled free of Harry Potter's grasp and headed towards the kitchen.

Mitzy rushed over to her. "Mitzy gets something for Mistress Mie?"

"No thank you." Cammie opened the cooler and pulled out several bottles of champagne.

Harry had followed her. "Mie, what are you doing?"

Cammie didn't stop to explain. "Grab some glasses."

Harry did as he was told, all at once realizing what his friend intended to do. Everyone was surprised to see Cammie with champagne when she and Harry returned. Hermione, as Harry had, questioned her daughter. "Cammie, what are you doing?"

"Luna said that Uncle Harry went out fighting for what is right." Cammie tapped the champagne bottles with her wand, the corks flying out. "And I think it's only right that we toast that instead of lamenting the fact that he's gone."

H.J. was filled with admiration for his daughter, and he held out a hand to take a bottle from her, filling up glasses when she handed it over. One by one each of them made a toast to Harry, until only H.J. and Thomas remained to make one.

Thomas lifted his glass. "To Harry, a most worthy adversary in any world."

Everyone murmured Harry's name and all eyes turned to H.J., who raised his glass. "To Harry, if it wasn't for him I wouldn't be here now in the company of the few people I have grown to consider as my

family. He was the best brother a man could ever wish for, and my life has been better for knowing him.”

Cammie gave a tiny sob as she said Harry’s name, and then she fled from the room.

Harry Potter went after her, catching up with her in the conservatory. “Hey, I thought you said no lamenting.”

“I did.” Cammie’s sobs grew louder. “But H.J.’s speech made me realize that everyone in that room is my family and I’m afraid that Dominus won’t stop until he’s destroyed everyone I love just as he did Uncle Harry.”

“We’ll stop him somehow.” Harry held her close against him. “I don’t know how yet. But we will.”

“Do you promise?” Cammie asked as she buried her nose in Harry’s shirt.

“I promise.” Harry said gently.

Cammie closed her eyes as she inhaled Harry’s cologne. “Then I believe you.”

“That’s showing quite a lot of trust in someone.” Thomas interrupted the pair. “I didn’t mean to intrude but I just wanted to make sure you’re okay.”

“I’m fine, Uncle Thomas.” Cammie turned to face him. “And I trust Harry because he’s my best friend, and I know he’d never lie to me.”

Thomas caught the faint wince as Cammie called Harry her best friend, and he immediately realized that Harry felt more for his niece than he was letting on. “Everyone needs a best friend, Cammie. You’re lucky to have Harry.”

Cammie remembered a previous conversation that she'd had with Thomas, and she blew her nose on the tissues that she'd started carrying around with her. "Do you still miss your best friend?"

"I do but I've been lucky enough to gain a new one in Regulus Black." Thomas informed her. "He's put himself out for me in more ways than I can ever thank him for."

"If he's as willing to do for you as Harry did for me, then he must be a good friend." Cammie let go of Harry to hug Thomas. "Thanks for coming to check on me."

"I believe in taking care of those who are important to me." Thomas kissed Cammie on the forehead. "And next to my wife and children, you're the most important."

Cammie smiled up at her Uncle. "I know you're fibbing but it makes me feel special."

"Like Harry there, I don't lie if I can possibly help it." Thomas gave Harry a quick smile. "Please look after my niece."

"I'd do anything for her." Harry assured him.

"I'm sure you would, Harry." With that Thomas walked off, neither of them able to see the slight smile that was playing around his lips nor hear the words he spoke to himself. "Just as she'd do anything for you, even if she doesn't know it yet."

One week later

Cammie took off her black cloak, and burst into tears yet again. "I know it's real but I can't believe Uncle Harry's really gone."

Harry, who'd stayed by Cammie's side during the memorial service, immediately moved to comfort her. "I still feel responsible."

"You didn't cast that curse." Cammie raised her tear-drenched face, and told him what everyone else had been telling him since H.J. had

performed the ritual to determine whether Harry was dead. "It was your mother."

Cammie's pointing out the truth didn't make Harry feel any better. "But if I hadn't been so stupid as to listen to Draco, then Mum wouldn't have had a chance to ask for me to be apprenticed, I wouldn't have met you, and Harry wouldn't have been able to use me to convict Mum."

"Harry, if you hadn't then I'd still be in Castrum House." Cammie correctly observed as she wiped her eyes. "And Uncle Harry would have been serving Dominus."

"At least he'd still be alive." Harry's voice was full of bitter self-recrimination. "Why the fuck couldn't I just have stayed behind? If I hadn't gone, Dad wouldn't still be in hospital, and Mum would never have had a second chance to kill Harry."

"You thought you were doing the right thing." Cammie could see though that Harry didn't think that.

"That's what I thought when I decided to go to your Uncle for help." Harry shook his head. "And look where that got him."

A thought occurred to Cammie. "Given what's happened, do you regret helping me?"

"Never." Harry immediately responded. "If I hadn't met you, then I'd have become Mum's apprentice without a second thought. I'd still be the same arrogant little shit I was before I met you." Harry's voice was filled with self-disgust. "And I would have reveled in a day like today."

"You can't have been that bad." Even though Harry had given examples of what he'd been like before, Cammie still didn't believe he'd have celebrated her Uncle's death.

"Your mother could you tell you differently." Harry remembered how terribly he and Draco had treated Hermione. "Draco and I were vile to her."

Cammie pulled a face. "Most Slytherins were vile, Harry. It's the nature of that house."

"But we were worse to Hermione than anyone else." Harry kept his eyes on Cammie's face as he told about just one of the times he'd picked on Hermione. "I remember one incident where we cornered her outside of the library. We'd destroyed her things, and to top it off we ended up insulting her by calling her a 'Mudblood'. Harry was the librarian then, and he intervened and punished us."

"And?" Cammie knew there was more from Harry's face.

"I thought I was so superior to Hermione; I was furious that I'd been punished. Father came along and found out what had gone on. I thought he'd revoke the punishment. He didn't; he let it stand." Harry wasn't entirely surprised when Cammie pulled her hand free.

"And now?" Cammie's voice was cold.

"I regret it." Harry answered honestly. "I was young and stupid, and should have known better. I apologized to your mother when she moved into Potter Place." Harry took hold of Cammie's hand again. "It's because of you that I'm no longer like that. If it hadn't been for meeting you, I'd still hate my Dad, and I'd be serving Mum and Dominus. When she killed Harry, I'd have probably been cheering Mum on."

Cammie shook her head. "I don't believe that, Harry. You'd never be that callous."

Still hating himself for what had happened to her Uncle, Harry decided to prove otherwise to Cammie. "I once made a bet with Draco that I could get a little further than I should have with Cassandra."

"What do you mean?" Cammie asked.

Harry explained what had happened. "I tricked her into going to the Yule Ball with me by convincing her I was lonely. I even fooled my own sister into helping me just so I could set Cassandra up."

Cammie couldn't hide her disgust. "Did you sleep with her?"

"No." Harry was glad now that Cassandra had reacted as she had. "I ended up alone and with a slapped face for my troubles."

"Why are you telling me this, Harry?" Cammie was disgusted but she knew there was more to it than she could discern.

"I want to show you that I'm not the knight-in-shining-armor you seem to think I am." Harry was aware he was hurting himself but he couldn't help it.

Cammie realized that Harry was still blaming himself for her Uncle's death, and that he wanted her to do the same. "Harry, it doesn't matter what you tell me. I'm not going to hold you responsible for Uncle Harry's death nor for what happened to your Dad."

Harry sank down against the wall of the conservatory. "I've played the scene of what happened over and over again, and I wonder if I could have something different; something that might have stopped Dad from being so badly hurt."

Cammie could hear the grief in Harry's voice, and she softened. "Your Dad did what any parent would do, Harry."

Harry disagreed. "My mother just stood there, Cammie. She'd have let Dominus kill me, and it hurts. Even after everything she's done, I still love Mum but she obviously doesn't feel the same way about me."

Cammie's tears, which had stopped as she'd listened to Harry, started afresh, this time not for her Uncle, but for her friend. "I'm really sorry, Harry."

Harry dropped his head into hands. "Harry died to help save me and Dad. Why couldn't my own mother?"

Cammie climbed onto Harry's lap and held his head against her breast as he finally cried for the first time since he'd gotten back from Azkaban.

As the two of them took comfort in each other in the conservatory, Cassandra sat numbly in the sitting room as everyone moved around her. Her eyes red-rimmed from weeping, Luna sat down by her friend, a plate in her hand. "Cassandra, please try and eat something."

Cassandra just shook her head. "I'm not hungry."

"You're barely eating enough to keep a nargle alive." Luna protested. "Harry wouldn't want you to do this to yourself."

"Harry's dead." Cassandra's voice was bereft of any intonation. "So you don't know what he'd want."

"I know..." Luna was cut off as Cassandra got to her feet.

Cassandra shook her head. "Luna, you don't know anything. If you'll excuse me, I'm going to my room."

Sirius joined Luna as Cassandra left. "You didn't have any luck, did you?"

"She can't keep going on like this." Luna, together with everyone else, had tried to reach Cassandra, only to fail. "She hasn't shed a single tear since she found out. It isn't good for her."

"I'm going to try and talk to her again." Sirius headed upstairs to his daughter's room and knocked on the door. "Cassie, can I come in?"

"If you want to." Cassandra's voice still had the same dead tone to it that it had had since she'd found out that Harry hadn't made it as they'd hoped.

Sirius was dismayed to find a glass of wine in his daughter's hand. "Cassie, you can't keep drinking and not eating."

"I can do whatever I want." Cassandra sank onto the sofa and pulled her feet up under her.

"Drinking won't bring him back." Sirius said softly as he sat down by her.

"No, but it helps me to forget that just for one moment I was truly happy." Cassandra took a large mouthful of her wine as if to prove a point.

Sirius took hold his daughter's left hand, the flawless diamond engagement ring that Harry had given her on Christmas Day twinkling in the firelight. "I know you don't want to hear it right now but you will be again."

"You're right, Dad." Cassandra pulled her hand free. "I don't want to hear it. And I'd really like to be alone."

Aware that he wasn't getting through to her, Sirius got to his feet. "If you need anything, I'm just down the corridor, Cassie. It doesn't matter if it's the middle of the night."

"I'm fine." Cassandra didn't bother looking up at her father, instead turning her gaze on the ring that sat on her finger. "I believed I'd be with him forever, and now I'll be alone forever instead."

Sirius decided that now wasn't a good time to point out that he'd thought the same when Eleanor had died. "Cassie, are you sure you wouldn't rather come back downstairs?"

"I just want to be left alone." Cassandra reiterated her earlier request.

Defeated, Sirius opened the door and left the room.

Cassandra continued to stare at her ring. "Harry, why did you leave me?"

Next Chapter: Cassandra takes a turn for the worse; Cammie gets into more trouble than she realizes.

Chapter 56: A Downward Spiral

24 January 2006

Mione knocked on Thomas' door. "Can I come in?"

Thomas got up from his desk and headed out of his study. "I've finished." He could see the worry in his wife's face. "What's wrong?"

"Sirius has failed to get into Cassandra's apartment." Mione, like everyone else, had been alarmed when, three days after the memorial service, Cassandra had moved home. She had told everyone she wanted some time alone to get over Harry's death, and promptly warded her apartment so that she couldn't be disturbed. When she hadn't returned to work, as she'd owed Sirius to say she would, a panicked effort to break into the apartment had begun. "Can you try?"

Thomas knew why Mione was asking him. The day before he'd performed a feat that would normally have been impossible for one person. He'd single-handedly invoked the Fidelius over the entire Island, after Mione had said she was worried about the children's safety, and to prepare it for Cammie's belated arrival in a few days' time. "The wardbreakers couldn't get in?"

Mione had stood and watched as Anna Jameson and Bill Weasley had tried and failed. "Not even when they worked together. Next to Harry..." Here Mione's voice caught as she thought about her former husband and the reason why Cassandra had locked herself away. "...you're the strongest magical person I know."

Thomas didn't bother to say that Harry wasn't even close to his magical propensity, and he reluctantly agreed to take a look to keep his wife happy. "I'll meet you at the apartment."

When Mione apparated to the apartment building, she found Thomas was actually on the roof. "They tried to get in this way but failed. So why are you up here?"

“I can sense the wards better up here.” Thomas pulled out his wand and began to cast spells to detect what Cassandra had done. “It looks as though your friend has been tinkering in darker magic than I’d have given her credit for knowing.”

“What do you mean?” Mione asked, as she continued to watch light dance from Thomas’ wand. “Neither Anna nor Bill mentioned dark magic.”

“They may not have recognized it for what it is. As it is, there are two components here that even I don’t recognize. Let me check out a few spells in the library on the Island, and I’ll return as soon as I can.” Thomas resignedly pulled out his portkey and vanished.

After returning home, Mione spent the next few hours pacing until Thomas returned, visibly tired. “I hate travelling like that.”

“Do you feel up to doing this now?” Mione was aware that most people would have been brought to their knees by the short time between the portkey journeys.

“I’ll take a pepper-up.” Thomas procured one before leaving to join his wife on top of the building once more. “It’s bloody freezing out here.”

Mione immediately cast a warming spell. “Everyone else is downstairs in the hallway.”

“As I’ve already said, I can sense the wards better up here.” Thomas was short with wife as he again began to assess the wards.

Mione didn’t take Thomas’ shortness personally as she knew that Thomas was already tired, and what he was about to do would only exacerbate the problem. “Do you think you can get in?”

Thomas had been surprised when he’d looked up the results of what he’d found on first checking the warding. He knew that Rupert might have recognized the spells he hadn’t but that the wardbreaker, unlike Anna, would have refrained from helping fully. “The spells she’s used

are both extremely old and illegal. With what I've read, I can get in but I'll need Sirius' help as Cassandra has also used blood magic to help cement the wards."

Mione apparated down to the hallway where the others were still trying to get in from that way having failed to get in via the roof, and she told them what Thomas was trying to do. Sirius immediately apparated to the top of the building, and a short time later a mighty bang signaled that the wards had finally collapsed. Xander and Orion, who'd followed Sirius up onto the roof, both reached out and grabbed Thomas as he buckled from exhaustion, his reserves still not quite what they should be after his efforts at Azkaban three weeks earlier, his spell casting the previous day, and his portkey trips.

Knowing he'd be taken care of by the two young men, Mione, together with Katherine, Luna and Sirius apparated into Cassandra's apartment. Luna coughed. "I think a freshening charm would be a good idea."

Mione cast one, her nose wrinkling at the smell of rotting food and stale alcohol. "Where is she?"

Sirius, who, while tired from helping Thomas, was still on his feet, and he moved further into the apartment, and over to the sofa. "Oh Merlin."

The three women hurried to Sirius' side, to find that Cassandra was half-naked, her hair was unwashed and she smelt as bad as her apartment. She was also totally unaware of the scrutiny she was receiving, having passed into a drunken stupor.

Sirius dropped to his knees and immediately cast enervate. "Cassie?"

Cassandra didn't respond except to grunt. Sirius pulled out a sobering potion which, among other things, he'd taken the precaution of bringing. "Help me get this down her. If she doesn't respond, I'm taking her to St. Mungo's."

Katherine and Luna propped up their friend, as Mione forced her mouth open and gently began to massage Cassandra's throat as

Sirius tipped the potion into his daughter's mouth. The result was almost instantaneous as the potion hit her bloodstream. Cassandra groaned out loud. "Head."

Sirius fed her a hangover potion. "Cassie, open your eyes."

Even after the potions, Cassandra was still barely coherent. "Go 'way."

"Let's get her into a bath." Luna suggested.

Sirius lifted his daughter up and carried her into the bathroom, Luna and Katherine following him.

Mione was also about to follow but hesitated as Orion and the others appeared. "Can the rest of you start to tidy this place up?" She then followed the path that Sirius and the women had taken.

Once a bath had been drawn, the three women took over from Sirius shooing him out, and undressing a wobbly and still out-of-things Cassandra. Mione stared worriedly at the size of the bathtub. "I'll transfigure my underwear into a bathing suit, and get in with her."

In the end, all three girls ended up climbing into the bathtub and helping Cassandra bathe. When they'd finished cleaning her up, Luna dried her and found a fresh nightgown, shrinking it when it hung off her friend. "Come on, let's get you into bed."

Mione dried herself off and transfigured her clothes back into their original state before she headed into the sitting room. "She's in bed." She looked around the room. "Did she eat anything anyone had left her?"

Sirius shook his head. "She didn't even bother renewing the spells to keep it fresh. Orion has gone to fetch her something from home."

Thomas was sitting on the freshly cleaned sofa, his eyes closed as he dozed, and Mione picked up a blanket that Cassandra hadn't bothered to cover herself with and placed it over her husband. "How did she manage to cast the spells she did?"

“Blood and dark magic doesn’t necessarily always take a lot of power but it does eat into your soul.” Sirius and Anna had spoken to Thomas about what Cassandra had used before he’d fallen asleep. “I think once she’s recovered, she’ll end up going through the same as Cammie did but she’s not well enough to go through withdrawal right now.”

“We took her wands off her.” Mione told him. “Should we strap them back on?”

Sirius shook his head. “I’ll be staying with her, so I can give them to her.”

“I’m staying as well.” Mione wasn’t leaving Cassandra in the state she was in. “So are Katherine and Luna.”

Orion appeared, a large basket in his hand. “Biper provided lots of light food for Cass to try.”

Mione looked inside the basket. “We’ll get some clear soup into her first.”

As the little team of rescuers went about their business, Thomas slept on completely unaware of what was going on around him.

Sirius stood over the man. “I owe him a life debt for Cassie.”

“Sirius, I’m sure Thomas won’t accept it.” Mione responded confidently, totally unaware that Thomas would have enjoyed Sirius owing him something. “And isn’t Cassandra a little too old for you to take the responsibility?”

“As head of the Black family, I can assume a life debt for any member of it.” Sirius revealed. “And if it wasn’t for Thomas, I doubt I’ve have managed to get through the wards, and I can only imagine what would have happened to my daughter if he hadn’t been able to help.”

“You don’t really think she’d have killed herself?” Mione was shocked by what Sirius was intimating.

“Maybe not deliberately.” Sirius picked up the bowl of soup that Luna had sorted out. “But with the amount of alcohol she’s obviously drunk and lack of food, sheer failure to take care of herself might have done it.”

When Sirius entered the room, he found Katherine plaiting Cassandra’s hair, as she sat staring into space. He smiled at his daughter-in-law. “Thanks.”

Katherine kissed Cassandra’s cheeks and left, understanding that Sirius wanted to be alone with his daughter. “Cassie, honey, I need you to eat something.”

“Not hungry.” Cassandra’s voice was thready and tired sounding. “Leave me alone.”

Sirius ignored her, propped pillows up behind her, and then he dipped the spoon into the bowl of soup, and brought it up to Cassandra’s mouth. “Open up.”

“Not...” Cassandra didn’t get a chance to say anything else as Sirius inserted the spoon into her mouth, and Cassandra had little choice but to swallow or spit it out; she swallowed.

Sirius dipped the spoon back into the bowl. “And again.”

This time Cassandra obediently let her father feed her. Sirius smiled as his daughter slowly began to take in her first real, if liquid, food for days. “I used to feed you like this when you were sick.” Sirius stroked Cassandra’s fringe off her face. “You always used to shake your head to try and dislodge the spoon.”

Cassandra didn’t say anything but merely kept opening her mouth when required to. Eventually though she’d had enough. “No more.”

Sirius noted that she'd managed half a bowl, and that her eyes were drooping. "Try and get some sleep, Cassie."

Cassandra let her eyelids flutter down, and for the first time in days she fell into a natural sleep. Sirius waited a few moments before covering her over, and taking out the half-empty bowl. He addressed Orion. "Go back to Hogwarts with Katherine. I know you'd planned to stay but there's no need. I can manage her on my own."

Mione was sitting on the sofa next to a still sleeping Thomas. "Can I do anything?"

"No, just take Thomas home, and tell him I'll be in touch." Sirius had the feeling that Thomas would sleep for some time yet.

Even though she wanted to stay, Luna was well aware that Sirius wanted to be alone with his daughter, and she therefore stood up. "On my way home do you want me to let Faith know that you've gotten in?"

"Thank you." Sirius asked for a further favor from her. "Could you also let H.J. know that I'll need Alasdair to cover for me for at least the next week?"

"I will." Luna promised. "Let me know if you need anything at all."

Sirius said goodbye to everyone, before casting a ward over Cassandra and settling down in front of the television set. He did notice that she'd reached over and picked up one of her wands, confirming his guess that she, like Cammie, had unwittingly set off an addiction; not from over-practice but from dabbling with the wrong spells. When she still hadn't woken up at midnight, he went into her room, pulled off his shoes and climbed on top of the bed, so that he could keep an eye on her if she woke.

The clock had just struck four when Cassandra came awake. Sensing someone was there, she called out. "Harry?"

Sirius immediately opened his eyes, and switched on the bedside lamp. "It's Dad."

Cassandra's face fell. "I thought..."

"I know, honey." Sirius sat up. "I didn't want to leave you alone."

"I'm okay." Cassandra lied, feeling exhausted and weak.

"I know that's a lie." Sirius called her on it. "Let me get you something else to eat."

"I don't want anything." However, Cassandra's stomach grumbled. Having received some sustenance, it now wanted more.

"I'll just make you some toast." Sirius got up from the bed.

Cassandra had little say in the matter, as Sirius headed into the kitchen.

When he came back with a pile of hot toast and a glass of warm milk, a childhood favorite of Cassandra's, he found her shakily getting back into bed. "I would have helped you if you'd asked."

"I can go to the bathroom on my own." Cassandra wiped the beads of sweat that had appeared as she'd wobbled across the room.

Sirius put down the toast and milk. "Let me tuck you in."

"Dad!" Cassandra protested but let Sirius do it, feeling comforted by the motion as he plumped her pillows and pulled the duvet up to her waist.

"Now eat something." Sirius put a pile of dry toast in front of her.

"Dry?" Cassandra baulked.

“You haven’t eaten in a while.” Sirius pointed out. “I doubt your stomach would thank you if I’d buttered it.”

Cassandra bit half-heartedly into the toast as she watched her Dad tucking into what she would have preferred. “Dad, I can try a bit of that?”

Sirius offered her his plate. “Don’t rush it.”

“I won’t.” Cassandra bit into the toast, and gave a tiny moan. “That’s so good.”

“It’s only toast, Cassie.” Sirius stopped eating. “Honey, when did you last eat?”

Cassandra swallowed the mouthful of toast, and looked down at the plate in front of her. “I don’t know.”

“Carry on eating.” Sirius didn’t want her to stop. “And drink some of that milk.”

Cassandra managed a slice of toast and half of the glass of milk. “I’ve had enough, Dad.”

Sirius banished everything that was left to the kitchen. “Now lie down.”

Cassandra did as she was told. After a few minutes of lying in the dark, she found she couldn’t sleep. “Dad?”

“Yes?” Sirius had again lain back down next to his daughter.

“How did you get in?” Cassandra had thought she’d made the apartment impenetrable.

“Thomas had to break through the wards with my help.” Sirius sat back up. “Cassie, why did you lock yourself away?”

“I needed some time alone.” Cassandra played with her sheet in the darkness.

“Did you intend to try and kill yourself?” Sirius knew he was being blunt but he needed to ascertain his daughter’s mindset.

“No!” Cassandra’s response was vehement. “I just couldn’t face up to being without Harry.” Her voice trembled on Harry’s name.

“Have you cried yet?” Sirius asked gently, hearing his daughter’s voice wobble.

“I can’t.” Cassandra had tried. “It’s almost as if my tears have dried up.”

Sirius heard the yawn that followed. “Cassie, don’t worry about it now. I think you should and get some sleep again.”

“Okay.” Cassandra closed her eyes, and this time fell asleep within moments. Sirius also yawned and quickly followed his daughter’s example.

Three days later

Cassandra finished the meal that Sirius had prepared. “Dad, thanks.”

Sirius took their plates into the kitchen and returned to sit by Cassandra. “What do you want to do tonight?”

Cassandra sighed. “Dad, you really don’t have to stay and amuse me anymore. I’m sure Faith would like you home.”

“Faith understands.” As Cassandra had refused to go home with him, Sirius wasn’t leaving until he was certain that Cassandra was truly on the road to recovery. “So what would you like to do?”

“Watch a movie.” Cassandra decided. “I’ll just go and get myself a blanket that’s a bit warmer than this one. Do you want one?”

“This one will do.” Sirius indicated the discarded one.

Cassandra shook her head. “It’s not that warm. I’ll get you one of the thicker blankets out of the closet.”

When she hadn’t returned, and five minutes had passed, Sirius frowned. “Cassie?” Getting no response, he headed into her bedroom. “Cass?” A noise alerted him to the fact she was still in the closet. Sirius found her sitting on the floor, blankets littering the floor, and a small stuffed wolf on her lap. “What is it?”

“I’d put it away when I was spring cleaning.” Cassandra stroked the fur on the wolf. “I was jealous when Xander had bought one for Luna, so Harry bought him for me for Christmas.”

“Can I see?” Sirius held out a hand.

Cassandra passed over her prized possession.

Sirius handed back the wolf. “He looks a little like Harry’s Animagus doesn’t he?”

“I think that’s why he chose it.” As she clutched the wolf to her chest, Cassandra’s face suddenly crumpled, and she reverted to her childhood manner of addressing Sirius. “Daddy, why did he have to leave me? I miss him so much.”

Sirius held out his arms as the much needed tears began, and he began to rock his daughter as she wept. “I miss him too, Cassie.”

Cassandra didn’t respond, and clutching both the wolf and her Dad, continued crying, massive sobs wracking her body as she finally let her out anguish at Harry’s death.

Sirius couldn’t stop his own tears at his daughter’s pain, and he didn’t try to hold them back as he comforted Cassandra.

6 February 2006

It wasn't long after six a.m. when Thomas rounded the head of the very tip of the Island, his feet pounding on the hard sand as he jogged in the dim morning light. He ground to a halt, his wand flying into his hand when he perceived a shadow in front of him. Lighting the area, he found his niece standing not ten feet away from him, a frightened look on her face. "Cammie, is there something you want to tell me?"

"No." Cammie's voice was shaking.

Thomas challenged Cammie's denial. "Are you certain about that?"

Cammie immediately dropped her head. "My eyes are black, aren't they?"

"Very." Thomas responded. "How long have you been practicing the Dark Arts again?"

Cammie held back the frightened tears that threatened to fall as she answered the question. "Since just after we found out Uncle Harry had died. I didn't think one spell would hurt, and after what happened to him, I couldn't deal with not being able to defend myself and my family."

"Does anyone else know about this?" Thomas wondered who else was aware that Cammie had resumed the practice.

Cammie shook her head. "No. I couldn't tell anyone." She turned pitiful eyes on Thomas. "You won't tell anyone, will you?"

Thomas ignored the question and held out his hand. "Hand me your wands."

"You can't take them." Cammie could still easily remember the gut-wrenching need she'd experienced when she'd gone through her withdrawal.

“Wands, Cammie.” Thomas’ voice was firm. When she didn’t hand them over, Thomas extracted them forcibly, the wands flying into his hands.

Cammie gaped. “My holsters are Auror class. How can you do that?”

“You’d be surprised at what I can do.” Thomas remarked wryly. “Now I suggest you apparate back home. I’m going to finish my morning run. You’ll join me in my study at ten o’clock.”

Cammie ignored Thomas’ order to apparate, and turned on her heel to begin the long walk back to the house.

Thomas continued in the direction he had been heading, Cammie’s wands now sitting snugly next to his own.

The clock had just struck ten when Thomas heard a knock on his study door. “Come in, Cammie.” When she came in, Thomas pointed to the chair in front of his desk. “Sit down.”

Cammie sat down, her fingers twisting in her lap. “Can I please have my wands back, Uncle Thomas? I promise I won’t do any more Dark Art spells.”

“We both know you’re lying, Cammie.” Thomas moved to sit on the edge of the desk. “You do realize how upset your parents are going to be when they find out, don’t you?”

“You can’t tell them.” Cammie responded in a panicked voice. “Dad would kill me.”

“Even if I didn’t tell them, someone else is going to find out, just as I did, Cammie.” Thomas could see how agitated his niece was becoming. “Your eyes are a dead giveaway.”

“I only do the spells at night or if no-one is home.” Cammie revealed how she’d been able to carry out her practice without being discovered. “I made a mistake by doing them on the beach. I didn’t think that you’d take a morning run after getting back so late last

night.” Thomas and Mione hadn’t arrived home from an important client dinner until almost three a.m. Unable to sleep, Cammie had gotten up to get herself a glass of milk, and had bumped into them on her return to her bedroom.

“I like to keep myself fit, Cammie.” Thomas informed her as to why he’d still decided to take his run despite his late arrival home. “You’d be surprised at how much difference it makes when you’re dueling.”

Cammie could see that Thomas’ face had softened from the stern look it had assumed when he’d first spotted her. “Please, Uncle Thomas. Don’t tell Dad.”

“Cammie, what happens if you’re doing the spells at home, and someone gets up in the night, or comes home unexpectedly and discovers what you’re doing?” Thomas unholstered Cammie’s wands from his arms. “How would I explain away that I knew, and did nothing about it?”

“I’d never tell anyone you knew.” Cammie couldn’t tear her gaze away from the wands in Thomas’ hands, and she itched to reach out and grab them.

“I don’t know if I can keep quiet about this, Cammie.” Thomas stood up and walked back around his desk, moving the wands further away from Cammie. “I’m not sure your parents would ever forgive me if I did.”

Tears of desperation filled Cammie’s eyes, the precious wands just feet from her. “I swear I’d never tell them. I’ll do anything you ask. Please, just give me my wands.”

“What about your eyes, Cammie?” Thomas reminded her of the stumbling block.

“You must know a spell that could help me.” Cammie smiled winningly through her tears. “Please.”

“There isn’t one.” Thomas watched the hope fade from Cammie’s face.

Cammie was now perched on the edge of her seat, her eyes still glued to the wands. “There must be something.”

Thomas sighed. “There is but I’m not sure it’s the answer to your problem.”

Hope rose in Cammie again. “What is it?”

“The only way is to embrace the Dark Arts fully.” Thomas tapped the wands gently on the desk, noting how Cammie’s eyes followed the movement unblinkingly.

“What do you mean?” Cammie got up from her seat, her hand resting on the edge of desk, wondering if she could reach out and take the wands.

Thomas was entirely aware of what his niece was considering, and he replaced the wands in his holster. “As I’ve just said, I don’t think it’s the answer to your problem.” He looked regretfully at his niece. “I’m going to have to tell your parents, Cammie. It wouldn’t be right to do anything else.”

“No!” Cammie’s voice was full of desperation. “Please, Uncle Thomas. Don’t tell them.”

Thomas knew then that he had Cammie where he wanted her. “If I agree not to, you must swear an oath that this will remain between us.”

“I’ll do anything.” Cammie reiterated her earlier statement. “Can I have my wands back now?”

Thomas unlocked his drawer and pulled out one of the painkilling potions he kept there for the occasional headaches he suffered from. “If I give you your wands back, you must swear that you will never tell anyone about your practicing the Dark Arts, what we will discuss

today, anything I'm about to teach you, and any further discussions we're going to have related to them."

Cammie held out her now violently shaking hands. "I'll swear it. Please just give me my wands."

When Thomas handed over the wands he wasn't surprised when Cammie took one and aimed it into the air, a Dark Arts spell coming easily to her lips. "Venenifer Aeris".

Thomas dissipated the toxic cloud. "Do you feel better now?"

Her shaking already starting to disappear, Cammie nodded. "Thank you, Uncle Thomas."

"Your oath, Cammie." Thomas gently reminded her.

Cammie swore the oath that Thomas had outlined, falling to her knees as pain coursed through her body. "That hurts."

"Take this." Thomas uncorked the vial and held it to his niece's lips. "It will take the pain away."

A shudder of relief went through Cammie as the potion negated the oath's pain. "I can see why people don't like swearing oaths."

Thomas held out a hand and pulled Cammie to her feet. "As Mione has left for work, we have time to talk about this. So sit down again, please."

Her wands once again in her possession, Cammie sat down. "Are you going to tell me how to stop the side effect?"

"Yes." Thomas leant forward. "For how long each day are you practicing the spells?"

"An hour or so." Cammie hadn't dared take any longer.

“As from this afternoon, you’ll be joining me in the dueling room.” Thomas instructed. “We’re going to be spending the rest of the day there. And we’ll be doing the same on Tuesday and Wednesday.”

“I thought you had to go to Sydney.” Cammie pointed out. “And Harry is supposed to be coming tomorrow.”

After what had happened in Azkaban, Sirius had agreed to let his godson visit the Island to help Cammie research the stone tablet they were searching for, having decided that Harry could get into less trouble that way.

“You’re more important.” Thomas could see that his words had pleased his niece. “Sydney can wait until Thursday, when Mione returns here.” He knew that Mione wouldn’t be very happy about it, but overcoming Cammie’s eye problem had to come first. “We’ll be practicing Dark Art spells until she does.”

“And what about Harry?” Cammie reminded Thomas about Harry.

Thomas had already thought about that. “Harry is going to be researching the stone tablet. As far as he’s concerned, you’re going to be receiving lessons from me relating to defense at that time, which in a manner of speaking you will.”

Cammie realized something else. “What about our eyes, Uncle Thomas? They’ll be black.”

Thomas explained how things would work. “We’ll finish at least two hours before you’ll be seeing Harry at dinner. I’ll be spending that time with Harry playing snooker or going over the research he’s been doing, which should give you enough time to recover.”

“But he’ll see your eyes.” Cammie pointed out a flaw in Thomas’ way of distracting Harry.

Thomas smiled. “I embraced the Dark Arts a long time ago, Cammie. I could cast curses for ten minutes or for ten hours now; it wouldn’t

make any difference. Harry will have absolutely no idea of what I've been doing."

A shiver ran down Cammie's back at the almost secretive smile Thomas was displaying. "Why would you embrace the Dark Arts, Uncle Thomas?"

Seeing the wary look on Cammie's face, Thomas decided that it was still too early to tell her the truth about him, and told her his philosophy instead. "Because the world isn't simply black or white, good or evil, Cammie. I believe that to be truly at one with magic, you need to understand both sides of it, Light and Dark."

"You sound like the Emperor." Cammie was, however, once again smiling, totally unaware of how close her analogy truly was.

"You're right, I do." Thomas, of course, knew what Cammie was referring to, having not only seen the original Star Wars movie with her but the sequels too. "Although I'm afraid I'm not quite capable of building a death star, even being as rich as I am."

Cammie laughed out loud, feeling more relaxed than she had since Thomas had caught her. "So what spells are you going to teach me? I already know quite a few."

Thomas handed over a book he'd fetched from his library after showering. "I want you to read this today. If Harry sees it when he arrives, he'll think it's just a charms book, even if he takes it from you to look at it."

"Everyone would be angry with me if they found out what I was doing, wouldn't they?" Cammie asked in a quiet voice, as she took the book from Thomas. Even though she knew that what she was doing wasn't right, her need to practice the Dark Arts quashed the tiny voice inside her that told her to tell Harry, and she instead told herself that her Uncle was right; that she needed to understand both sides of magic.

“Extremely, but they’d be even angrier with me for encouraging you.” Thomas answered honestly. He leant forward, a slight pang of guilt forcing him to make an offer. “Cammie, you can still tell Harry what you’ve been doing, and go through the withdrawal instead.”

Cammie shook her head. “I can’t. He’d tell Dad.” Cammie knew that H.J. wouldn’t understand, and she was afraid that Harry would be the same way. “Besides, if I finally embrace the Darks Arts so that my eyes don’t turn black anymore, they never need to know.” She fingered the book in her hand. “I have to do this. I have to protect my family.”

“In that case, I’m willing to help you.” Thomas’ guilt dissipated at Cammie’s words. “Meet me for lunch at noon.” Thomas stood and walked around the desk. “Now I suggest you go sit outside and get some sun. You won’t be seeing much of it after lunch.”

After Cammie left, Thomas sat back down as he contemplated the hand fate had just dealt him.

Next Chapter: Sirius considers Harry's replacement; Cammie's first kiss; a rescue.

Chapter 57: When Magic Doesn't Work

13 February 2006

After dinner, Cassandra decided to take a walk in the conservatory. She wasn't surprised when her father followed her. "I'm okay, Dad."

"I'm not going to stop worrying about you just because you tell me to." Sirius had found that after Cassandra's episode, he was tending to worry more about her than he had ever done before.

"I know, Dad." Cassandra looped her arm through his, and looked up through the glass ceiling at the full moon that was filling the night sky. "I'd forgotten tonight was a full moon."

Sirius looked up as well. "So had I."

Without Harry being there, and with Remus now living in Scotland, the two of them had both found that the night had crept up on them unawares. Cassandra let go of her father's arm, and reflexively twisted around the engagement ring she still wore as she thought about the man who'd given it to her. "I hated what Harry went through during a full moon."

"I don't think he was too fond of it either." Sirius didn't try and change the subject, knowing that Cassandra still very much needed to talk about Harry.

"Even though it was horrible, I'd rather have him suffering through this night than gone." Cassandra's lips trembled. "When will it stop hurting, Dad?"

"I don't know." Sirius knew that it would though. "Come here."

Cassandra turned into Sirius' arms, and as she had done many times since the first time she'd broken down, wept on her father's chest.

At the same time, almost as if it was sympathizing with Cassandra, on Azkaban Island a wolf's mournful cry rent the air. One of the

Aurors on duty looked up at the same moon Cassandra had, and shivered. He turned to the man with him. "I thought this place wasn't supposed to have animals on it."

"It was once a populated Island." His companion responded disparagingly. "So of course it's got bloody animals on it."

The first Auror looked up again. "You don't suppose it's a werewolf, do you?"

"Don't be so ridiculous." The second Auror was now even more disparaging. "How the bloody hell would a werewolf get onto the Island? And what would it want anyway? We're the only ones here now. There are far easier pickings elsewhere."

The first Auror shivered again as he looked up at the darkened ruins of Azkaban that were silhouetted by the moonlight. "That might be so, but with that noise and what's left of that place, it's just too creepy for words."

"It's bloody empty." Not one to scare easily, the second Auror walked off alone to check the perimeter around the desolate, and darkened ruin.

Three Days Later

Sirius was tired when he went into work, having sat up yet again for hours with Cassandra, who, having agreed to stay with him and Faith until she returned to work, had talked endlessly about Harry in between her tears. He was looking forward to her return to her position on Monday, as he knew it would begin to get easier for her once she was able to focus on something other than Harry's death. Picking up the reports that had come in during the night, he started to read through them.

He was disturbed when Alasdair popped into his office before he headed home, having been in all night taking the two trainees he was overseeing on a night mission. "I've already signed off on the reports. There was nothing exciting in there."

“I still want to keep abreast of what’s gone on.” Sirius informed Alasdair, who'd stepped into Harry's shoes on a temporary basis while still managing to hold down his usual position. “But thanks for going through them.”

“All in a day’s, or in this case, night's work.” Alasdair sat down. “Have you given any thought as to who you’re going to replace Harry with yet?”

“You still don’t want the job?” Sirius had hoped Alasdair would remain in the position on a permanent basis.

Alasdair shook his head. “I’m not the desk type, Sirius. And I like the training position I hold now.”

“It was worth a try.” Sirius groaned. “I suppose I’ll have to trawl through the files to find a suitable replacement.”

“No-one springs to mind?” Alasdair asked.

Sirius had found himself baulking at replacing Harry with anyone other than Alasdair or his daughter. “Harry’s going to be hard to replace. I did think about Cassie but she hasn't got the experience.”

“How’s your girl doing?” Alasdair had known Cassandra since she was a baby.

“Much better but she’s hurting.” Sirius then told him when she'd be returning to work. “She’ll be back in on Monday.”

“Tell her to come see me.” Alasdair got up. “I’ll involve her in assessing some of the first year trainees; take her mind off Harry until she gets back into the swing of things.”

“Thanks.” Sirius picked the pile of reports back up. “I’d best get on.”

Dismissed, Alasdair left.

Sirius skimmed through most of the reports before putting them down again. The day wore on, and Sirius was just finishing up with his last piece of paperwork on the construction of a prison to replace Azkaban when something tickled at Sirius' mind. Getting up, he went over to the cabinet where reports were filed before moving on to the main report bank a month later, and he withdrew the reports that had come in over the previous few days. After finding the one he was looking for, he shook his head. "That can't be right." Getting up, he headed down to the Ops Desk. "Is Sparrow in?"

The Auror on duty checked the book. "He's patrolling the south end of Diagon Alley."

"Thank you." Sirius apparated directly to Diagon Alley. Having gotten engrossed in his work, Sirius hadn't realized it was so late and the streets of the Alley were now dark and deserted. With no-one else there, Sirius easily located the pair of Aurors who were strolling along the Alley. "Sparrow?" While Sirius liked to think he knew most of the Aurors under his command, Sparrow was one he couldn't recall.

The sandy-haired Auror saluted his superior. "Commander Black."

"At ease." Sirius could tell his appearance had rattled both Aurors. "Sparrow, you filed a report reporting a wolf on Azkaban three nights ago. Is that correct?"

"Yes, Sir." Sparrow wondered why Sirius was so interested. "I only mentioned it because I thought Azkaban Island was barren of life. Fillongley, the Auror with me, said that I was wrong."

"You weren't." Sirius confirmed. "Thank you." With that he vanished again, leaving a mystified pair of Aurors behind.

The Next Day

The moment it began to get light, Sirius headed to his office, unlocked his wall to take out a multi-use portkey, and portkeyed to Azkaban.

Julianne Solace, who had volunteered for the daytime watch on Azkaban knowing it wouldn't be too hard on her injury, saluted Sirius when he arrived. "Good morning, Sir."

"Solace, Viking." Sirius greeted both Aurors, and he got straight to the point of his unscheduled visit. "Have either of you come across any animals while you've been here; in particular, a wolf?"

Both women shook their head. "No, Sir."

"Thank you." Sirius headed out towards the area that Sparrow had reported the sound of a wolf's cry coming from. Once there he lay down before carefully looking over the edge.

"What am I doing?" Sirius hated heights, and always had done ever since Regulus had played a trick on him as a child, meaning that he'd ended up dangling from the upper staircase at Grimmauld Place. He'd been a little surprised when Harry had revealed that his counterpart had done something similar to his brother in Harry's world.

After spotting nothing, he pulled back, and repeated the question. "What am I doing?" He was about to leave when he decided to try something else. Instead of lying down, he transformed, and began to bark as loudly as he could. He then listened carefully.

Hearing the barking, both Julianne and Lucy apparated in the direction of the sound to find it coming from a large black dog. "Do you think it's the wolf that Commander Black just mentioned?"

"No. It's just a dog." Lucy reholstered the wand she'd drawn, and bent down, not realizing who the dog was. "Hello, boy. How did you get here?"

"I portkeyed." Sirius ducked as Julianne reflexively fired off a stunning spell when he transformed. "You can stand down, Solace."

Julianne went red. "Sorry, Sir."

“That’s quite alright.” Sirius wouldn’t have expected her to react any differently. “I need to change back again.”

The two women watched as their chief transformed, and once again began to bark loudly, before cocking his ears up, trying to listen over the sound of the ocean breaking against the cliff walls. Sirius transformed back into human form. “I thought I heard something coming from the base of the cliffs but I’m not sure.”

“Do you want me to fly down there?” Lucy offered, not exactly sure what Sirius was listening for. “I’m an eagle Animagus.”

Sirius wished he known earlier. “Be my guest.”

“What am I looking for, Sir?” Lucy asked before she changed.

“A man.” Sirius told her.

“Okay.” Lucy changed into a golden eagle before taking to the skies and heading down the cliffside.

Lucy circled the rocks, her powerful wings holding her above the waves. After circling for about ten minutes, she’d just about given up when her powerful eyesight spotted a crack in the cliff wall and flapping her wings, headed towards it.

Lucy felt the edge of the cliff brush her wing tips as she flew into the cave she’d spotted. She was more than a little surprised to discover that there was there a man propped up against the wall at the very back of the cave she'd just flown into it. Halfway into the cave, she suddenly found herself dropping out of the air as she transformed back into human form. Splashing into the water, a large and powerful wave pushed her towards the stone ledge at the back of the cave.

Harry reached into the water and grabbed the girl, pulling her up beside him. “Viking, you are a beautiful sight.”

Lucy couldn't say the same back; Harry looked terrible. "I'm not entirely certain your fiancée would be too happy to hear you say that to another woman."

Harry had been worried sick about Cassandra's safety, and he immediately asked after her. "She's alright?"

Lucy evaded the question. "She made it safely out from Azkaban."

"You're not being entirely truthful." Harry knew she was avoiding answering his question fully.

"She didn't sustain any major injuries." Lucy informed Harry briefly, as she pulled out her wand to check him over.

"It won't work." Harry had tried again and again to perform magic, only to fail every time. "I believe something in the cave wall is stopping any magic. After landing in the ocean, I was washed into the cave in my Animagus form but I changed midpoint as you did. When I tried to portkey out, that too failed."

"Are you hurt?" Lucy had noticed that Harry hadn't moved except to grab her.

"I broke my leg a few nights ago trying to swim out." Harry didn't tell her that he believed he tried to do so when he was transformed, only to come crashing back into the cave, breaking a leg. Not having Wolfsbane to help him retain his memory, Harry didn't remember swimming but when he'd awoken, it was only thing he could think of that explained his wet body and injured leg. "So how did you manage to find me?"

"It was Commander Black." Lucy informed Harry. "He's the one who thought someone might be here. He's on the cliff above us with Auror Solace."

"Is Cass with them?" Harry returned to the subject of his fiancée.

“She’s not. You’d better grit your teeth, Sir.” Lucy began to strap Harry’s leg up with the belt she’d had around her waist, using several pieces of driftwood as splints.

Harry resisted the urge to scream as Lucy manipulated the bone back into place. “I see you attended the extra classes on Muggle First Aid at USAD.”

“I didn’t really think they’d be useful at the time.” Lucy admitted. “But I’m glad I did now.”

“I’d prefer the magical option but this will have to do.” Harry did his best to keep still as Lucy strapped his leg up tightly.

When she’d finished, she stood back up. “I’m going to try and change back.” Lucy attempted it, only for nothing to happen. “It was worth a try.”

Harry patted the rock next to him. “Hopefully Sirius will work out what’s happened and come looking for us.”

“As long as he doesn’t fly in here on a broom.” Lucy remarked, as she dropped her wet cloak onto the floor, shivering uncontrollably.

“Tell me how Sirius managed to work out I was here.” Harry invited. “I heard barking, so I called out but then it went quiet.”

“Commander Black was the one barking, and I don’t know how he worked out you were here.” Lucy sat down next to Harry. “I’d offer to share the cloak to sit on but I’m sure you don’t want to get wet.”

Seeing how blue she’d gone and how violently she was shivering. Harry was afraid Lucy would get hypothermia, and put his arm around her. “Put your arms around me.”

Lucy blushed. “I’m not sure that’s entirely appropriate, Sir.”

“If I was you I’d worry less about propriety, and more about freezing to death before we’re rescued.” Harry pulled Lucy onto his lap, grimacing as pain shot through his broken leg.

Lucy was shocked to find out that Harry was warm, furnace warm. “How can you be this warm? It’s below freezing today.”

“Just lucky I guess.” Harry wrapped his arms around her. “I don’t suppose by any chance you’ve got any food that isn’t shrunken in your emergency pack.”

Lucy opened up the small pack that had been attached to her belt. “I’ve got Muggle matches but they’re wet, a chocolate bar, and my lipstick.”

Harry knew only too well that what she was carrying wasn’t standard regulation. “It’s not exactly what’s supposed to be in there.”

“Sorry, Sir.” Lucy went red. “But I didn’t expect to be in this situation on a routine patrol of what’s left of Azkaban.”

“In future fill it with the correct things.” Harry warned. “Otherwise you might find yourself eating mussels and anything else vaguely edible you manage to catch.” Harry had made his emergency supplies last as long as he could but in shrunken form and unable to perform magic, they’d provided little sustenance, and he’d had to rely on whatever he’d managed to find in the rock pools that became visible when the tide’s ebbing caused the water level in the cave to drop.

Lucy handed over the chocolate bar. “At least this is dry as it’s wrapped in plastic. You should eat it, Sir. I’ve had a large breakfast, and I’m sure it won’t be too long before we’re rescued.”

“I think you can call me Harry seeing as how you’re sitting on my lap.” Harry took the chocolate bar and ate it slowly, savoring every last mouthful. “After a singular diet of seafood, seaweed and fresh air, that was wonderful. Remind me to add a few unshrunken chocolate bars to the regulation list.”

“How did you manage without water?” Lucy hadn’t spotted any source of water.

“Just around the corner there’s fresh water that runs down the cave wall.” Harry was aware that he’d have died without it.

Lucy by now was beginning to stop shivering. “Harry, if I ask you something personal, will you be offended?”

“It depends on the question.” Harry could sense Lucy’s trepidation. “Go ahead.”

“You’re not a werewolf, are you?” Lucy’s voice was hesitant. It was the only reason she could think of why Harry would be so warm.

“Are you going to scream and try to swim for it, if I say yes?” Harry asked.

“Not unless you’re planning to eat me, I’m not.” Lucy wasn’t sure if Harry was joking with her.

“Then yes, I’m a werewolf.” Harry revealed. “And I might be hungry but no, I’m not planning to eat you. Not unless the next full moon comes around and we’re not out of here. In which case I suggest you take the scream and swim option.”

“I’ve seen the registered werewolf list.” It was a list that most of the Aurors had seen at one time or another in order to make checks. “And you’re not on it.”

“I think I already know that, Lucy.” Harry’s voice was dry.

“Sorry, Sir.” Lucy reverted back to formal address as she automatically apologized, and realized that Harry must have transformed several nights earlier if he was warning her about the next full moon. “Sir, why did you change if magic isn’t possible in here?”

“The werewolf isn’t magical per se.” Harry had hoped he’d avoid changing in the cave but his hopes had quickly been dashed. “It’s part of me, so I think that’s why I changed despite the cave’s restrictions.”

Lucy wondered if Cassandra was aware of Harry’s affliction. “Does Auror Black know?”

“I don’t have any secrets that Cass isn’t aware of.” Harry revealed that she wasn’t the only one who knew about him. “And Commander Black is also aware of my condition.”

“I won’t mention this to anyone, Sir.” After what Harry had done for her at USAD, Lucy only had admiration and respect for Harry, no matter what he was.

Harry knew he could have her obliviated after they got out, but aware she was being truthful, immediately decided against it. “Thank you, Lucy. But I wouldn’t have told you if I didn’t think I could trust you.”

Lucy felt warm inside. “That means a lot to me, Harry.”

Harry noticed she’d reverted back to using his first name. “Now we’ve gotten that out of the way, why don’t you tell me what I’ve been missing?”

“Well, you missed your memorial.” Lucy brought up the main thing.

It hadn’t even occurred to Harry that everyone had given him up for dead. “They thought I was dead?”

Lucy confirmed they had. “Yes. Despite numerous searches of the coastline around here, there wasn’t any sign of you. Then at your memorial, I was talking to Trainee Sebastian about you, and he said that he’d carried out a ritual to determine your status when two weeks had gone by, and it had shown you to be dead.”

Harry hadn’t asked about H.J., believing him to be dead given the dire situation they’d been in. “H.J. survived?”

Lucy's face was grave. "Yes, but he was badly hurt. Dominus has left him with a permanent and very painful leg injury." At Harry's despondent look, Lucy decided to give him the other news that H.J. had shared with her. "On a happier note, your brother is going to be a father."

Harry's face split into a happy grin. "That's wonderful news." He then lost the smile as he asked more about Cassandra. "How did Cassandra seem at the memorial?"

"Shell-shocked." Lucy couldn't think of a better word to describe how the pale-faced girl had looked. "She didn't cry at all, and barely spoke to anyone."

"How is she now?" Harry hoped she was improving.

"She's still not returned to work yet. I believe she's due to return on Monday." Lucy avoided looking at Harry.

Harry could feel Lucy's reluctance to say more. "What aren't you telling me?"

"It's just a rumor." Lucy began, before deciding to try and downplay things. "And probably nothing."

"Don't make me order you to tell me, Lucy." Harry warned.

Lucy knew that Harry's warning was tantamount to an order anyway, and she told him what she was holding back. "The rumor going around is that Auror Black tried to kill herself."

Harry didn't know what he'd been expecting to hear, but it hadn't been that. "Cass tried to kill herself?"

"I don't know if it's true, Sir." Nerves made Lucy switch back to Harry's formal salutation again. "But I heard from someone who apparently lives close to where you live that..."

“Hold on.” Taken aback by Lucy's comment, Harry interrupted her. “How does anyone know where I live, and who exactly is someone?”

“Is this an order?” Lucy didn't want to tell tales on anyone.

“Yes.” Harry decided.

“Auror Forman lives in Covent Garden. She's not only seen you and Auror Black together a few times around the markets, but she's seen you more than once going into the building opposite her own, so she presumed that you lived there.” Lucy couldn't determine whether Janine had been right or not. “Do you?”

“Yes.” Harry hadn't realized how sloppy he'd been, and had failed, as Moody put it, to keep up constant vigilance. “So how did she know about Cass?”

“About a week or so after your memorial, someone brought down what Janine decided had to be magical wards in your apartment building.” Lucy explained why her fellow Auror had arrived at her conclusion. “It had to be wards as even though Janine heard a massive explosion, her Muggle boyfriend didn't. When she went to check it out, she didn't find anything out of the ordinary and simply reported it the next day.”

Harry still didn't know how Janine had come to the conclusion she had about Cassandra. “So how did she manage to discern that Cass had tried to kill herself from that?”

Lucy broke it down for him. “A week after your memorial, Auror Black's name was on the duty roster but she didn't show. At the time we all simply assumed that she still wasn't feeling up to it. But then, after the wards were brought down, given the state that Cassandra had been in at your memorial, and, then with Commander Black not coming into work for almost a week, Janine put the events together, and hazarded a guess at what had happened.”

Harry was aware that something significant had had to have happened for Sirius not to go into work. “I've got to get out of here.”

Lucy had never seen Harry look so perturbed. "Harry, I'm sure Auror Black is okay now, otherwise Commander Black wouldn't have returned to work, and we'd have heard something if she'd succeeded in what Janine believed she'd done."

Harry calmed as the logic in Lucy's words filtered into his worried brain. "I still need to get out."

The sound of calling interrupted them. "Lucy? Lucy?"

"I'm okay." Lucy immediately yelled back, recognizing Solace's voice. "There's a crack to the left of the cliff wall behind the big black rock. But don't come in. I dropped back into human form when I flew into the cave as magic doesn't work in here. You'll need to arrange a boat or something. By the way, Auror Sebastian is alive and with me."

"I'll be back as soon as I can." Julianne promised as she yelled back towards the area where Lucy's calling was coming from.

Some eight hours later, Harry found himself being towed out of the cave in the arms of a British Navy diver. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, Sir." The diver responded automatically.

In the now fading daylight, Harry spotted a blanket-wrapped Lucy leaning over the side of a large boat; despite his condition he'd ordered her to leave first. Standing next to her, and looking worried was Sirius, and Harry yelled up to him. "Good afternoon, Sir. Nice to see you."

Sirius had to stop himself from using magic to get Harry up, having used his contacts to bring the British Navy in to make the rescue. Their job was made easier as Azkaban was no longer unplottable. "Harry, you have no idea how glad I am to see you."

"I doubt it's as glad as I am to see you." Harry called back as he was winched out of the ocean.

Sirius shook Harry's hand as soon as Harry reached the deck. "You look bloody terrible."

"How's Cass?" Harry needed to see if what Lucy had said was true.

"She's not been too good." Sirius followed along behind the gurney on which Harry had just been placed. "She didn't exactly handle the news of your death very well."

"Does she know I'm alright now?" Harry scowled at the sight of the white coated doctor as he was pushed into a large sterile looking room. "I don't need medical assistance."

The doctor stared at Harry in disbelief. "You obviously haven't seen yourself, Sir." He then proceeded to set up several IVs over Harry's protests.

Harry winced as needles pierced his skin. "I've had water to drink."

"This is more than just water." The doctor let his nurse cover Harry with several blankets, before she began to take his temperature.

Harry grumbled. "Why isn't Viking being poked and prodded?" Lucy was sitting on the bed opposite, several blankets wrapped around her, and a mug of chocolate in her hands.

"Because she hasn't just spent almost two months in a cave." Sirius pointed out as the nurse frowned.

Harry knew why she was frowning. "I don't have a temperature."

The nurse disagreed. "Sir, I'm afraid you have."

"I don't want them." Harry snapped as the nurse handed him some tablets. "I've lasted this long without medication."

"Don't be such a baby, Sir." The nurse waited expectantly as Harry begrudgingly took the Muggle tablets with the water she handed him. "Now lie back. We'll get you to a hospital as soon as we land."

This time Sirius stepped in. "We'll be transporting him ourselves to a private facility."

Harry had other ideas. "I need to see Cass, not more bloody healers."

Sirius disagreed. "Harry, you're a mess. If you agree to let Craig look at you first and he says that you can return with me to Grimmauld Place, then I'll let you accompany me. But if he does, it's also on the proviso that you don't return to work for at least a week."

Harry balked at doing nothing for a week, but aware that Sirius would simply pull rank rather than asking, he nodded. "Agreed."

Three hours later, once the boat had landed, and he was safely away from Muggle eyes, Harry pulled out the IV lines. "I don't need these."

"Hello." Craig had been waiting for them in the emergency medical facility that had been set up in case Harry's condition was more serious than it had been reported as being.

"Harry wants to be released, so if after looking him over you say he can go, I'll take him home with me." Sirius informed him.

Craig refrained from tutting as he ran his wand over Harry, casting a spell to repair the bone in his leg. "Sorry, Harry but I'd prefer for you to come to St. Mungo's. Your leg needs watching as that was a bad break, and you're suffering from malnutrition."

"Joy." Harry grimaced at Craig, but he was also aware that the man was just doing his job.

"He can take a shower first here if he wants to." Craig pointed to the door at the far side of the room. "It over there."

Sirius grabbed the bag that contained a change of clothes for Harry. "Hold onto me."

Harry let Sirius help him into the bathroom, and for the next twenty minutes he sat on the wooden-slatted bench that someone had thoughtfully placed in the shower, as the hot water washed over him. Using his wand to dry his hair, body and the bench, Harry summoned the bag, and just about managed to pull on his pajamas before exhaustion hit him, and he gave up on the shoes and socks. A knock signaled Sirius' return. "I'm decent."

Sirius opened the door, a bottle in his hand. "This our portkey. Craig doesn't want you apparating just yet."

Resigned to having to go to St. Mungo's, Harry waited patiently for Sirius to operate the portkey. When he did so, the portkey deposited them in the upstairs corridor of Sirius' house. "I thought we were going to St. Mungo's."

"You owe me a favor." Sirius nodded towards Cassandra's room, where he knew she'd be. "Do you need help to get in there?"

Harry did. "Please."

Harry leant heavily against Sirius, his newly repaired leg complaining as Sirius knocked gently at his daughter's door. Getting no response, Sirius opened the door to discover that Cassandra was sleeping under a blanket on her bed, the toy wolf Harry had bought her tucked up with her.

Even though Sirius had warned him, Harry was horrified at how thin Cassandra's face was. Helping him over to the bed, Sirius gently pulled aside the blanket so that Harry could also get underneath.

As Harry lay down beside Cassandra, putting an arm around her, and burying his face in her neck, Sirius knew it was time to go. "I'll be by later." He then walked away, and closed the door firmly behind him.

Only once the door clicked to, signifying that Sirius had gone, did Harry break down, and start to cry; relief and sheer exhaustion taking its toll on him.

The noise of someone weeping woke Cassandra, and she took a moment to realize she was being held. "Dad?"

As she turned, Cassandra didn't get a chance to look to see who was holding her, as her head was immediately held against a very bony but warm chest. She didn't know anyone apart from Remus and Harry who felt that warm, and she knew that Remus wasn't that thin, nor could she envisage her Uncle holding her while he cried. Her voice trembling, she voiced the name of the person she hoped against all odds that it was. "Harry?"

Harry let go of Cassandra's head as her muffled voice came from his shoulder. "It's me."

Cassandra could barely believe her eyes, and she reached up to touch his face, almost afraid she was dreaming that Harry was really there, as she had done far too often. "Please be real. Please be real." As her hand connected with his face, Cassandra closed her eyes as her fingertips touched the beard that Harry now sported. "Please be real."

Harry kissed her fingertips as they brushed over his lips. "I'm real, Cass."

Cassandra opened her eyes and started to cry as well. "Hold me. Just hold me."

Harry wrapped both arms around his fiancée. "Shh. I'm here, Cass."

"I thought you'd left me forever." Cassandra sobbed against Harry's neck.

Harry's heart contracted at the pain in Cassandra's voice. "Oh, Cass, angel. Didn't you notice the bite mark hadn't faded?"

Cassandra lifted her head up to look at Harry. "What do you mean?"

"If I'd died, it would have faded." Harry ran a thumb over the mark he'd inflicted.

“That’s what Mione said but Remus said that it wasn’t the case.” Mione’s words had given Cassandra temporary hope until the ritual had been carried out. “And then the ritual indicated you’d died.”

Harry realized that the difference in opinion between Mione and Remus was once again a difference between their two worlds. “Cass, you didn’t do anything stupid, did you?”

Cassandra dropped her head. “Did Dad tell you?”

“He just said that you hadn’t handled my supposed death very well.” Harry didn’t tell her what Lucy had said, wanting to hear it from Cassandra himself. “What happened?”

“ I didn’t want to see anyone.” Cassandra’s tears renewed themselves as she remembered how she had felt. “I just wanted to forget about the world around me. I went too far. Dad and Thomas had to break down the wards I’d erected.”

“What kind of wards?” Harry remembered Lucy’s comment about the loud explosion when the wards had collapsed.

“I used blood and really old dark magic.” Cassandra didn’t hide what she’d done. “I found the spells in Dad’s library.”

“You really didn’t want anyone getting in, did you?” Harry surmised that the wards would have been nearly impenetrable.

Cassandra shook her head. “Without you everything seemed pointless.”

“Merlin, Cass.” Harry pulled her more firmly against him. “I’m not worth killing yourself over.”

“I just gave up.” Cassandra tightened her grip on Harry. “But Dad refused to give up on me. He spent all week with me, feeding me, talking to me and just listening.”

Harry thanked all the deities he knew for Sirius' unrelenting love for his daughter. "Cass, promise me you'll never do anything like again, not even if I really don't come back next time."

"Then promise me there won't be a next time." Cassandra lifted her head. "Because I can't go through that again."

"I can't make a promise I can't keep." Harry said softly. "But I promise that I'll do whatever I can to never put you through that again."

"I'll take that." Cassandra stroked his face. "I love you, Harry."

"I love you as well." Harry kissed Cassandra as he'd dreamt of doing for most of the time he'd been stuck in the cave.

The two of them then curled up together, and within moments drifted off to sleep, safe in each others arms.

Grimmauld Square

Mione didn't bother knocking as she swept into Thomas' study. "You'll never guess what's happened."

Thomas rose to his feet, aware that it must be something momentous as his wife never usually entered without knocking. "As it could be any number of things, I'll just let you tell me."

Mione's smile was beyond brilliant. "Harry's been found alive."

Thomas couldn't hide his shock. "But the spell said he was dead."

Mione moved to hug her husband in her delight. "After being blasted off the cliff, he was washed into a cave that negated magic. Sirius worked it out after getting a report in about someone hearing a wolf cry on Azkaban Island during the full moon. It's wonderful news, isn't it?"

Thomas automatically wrapped his arms around his wife. "It's certainly news I didn't expect to get."

Mione went blithely on, unaware of her husband's feelings. "I bet Dominus is going to be pissed when he finds out."

"I'd say incensed would be a better word." Thomas couldn't believe that yet another of the three men, who were prophesied to stand a chance of beating him, had managed to somehow evade a certain death. "Where is he?"

"At Sirius' house with Cassandra." Mione sighed as she snuggled closer to her husband. "I can only imagine how happy she is. I know how bereft I'd be if I thought I'd lost you."

Mione's words softened the blow of her news. "You're not going to lose me."

"I should hope not." Mione let go of him. "Let's go have some champagne. It's nice to have something celebrate."

"That's what I thought on New Year's Eve." Thomas remarked wryly, as he let his wife lead him out of the study.

Mione grinned at him. "So did I. Then on New Year's Day when I found out about Harry, I thought this year was going to be awful but it just shows how wrong I was about my beliefs."

"And how wrong I was about my beliefs as well." Thomas echoed, as he wondered how everyone else was taking the news.

News that Harry Potter was about to break to Cammie, who'd returned from the Island that morning, as he hurried into the conservatory in his home, trying to find her. "Mie?" He shouted her name again when she didn't immediately answer. "Mie, are you in here?"

"Over here." Cammie was sitting in James' favorite spot on the sofa on the far side of the conservatory. "You look happy."

“They’ve found your Uncle, Mie.” Harry couldn’t stop grinning from relief as well as happiness. “Harry’s alive.”

Cammie shot to her feet. “But the spell Dad cast said he was dead.”

“He was washed into a cave at the bottom of Azkaban. Apparently there’s something in the walls that prevents any forms of magic, which included the spell that H.J. used from detecting him, making it appear as if he’d died.” Harry happily informed her.

Giving a delighted scream, Cammie threw herself at Harry. “I don’t believe it.”

Harry swung her around before placing her back on her feet. “I haven’t seen you this happy since I don’t know when.”

Cammie filled him in. “Christmas Day when you gave me my gift.”

“It really meant that much to you?” Harry was a little surprised she’d chosen that moment.

“Yes.” Cammie thought that Harry had understood how happy she’d been on Christmas Day. “I thought you knew.”

“I knew you liked it.” Harry had known that much. “But not that it meant that much to you.”

“It was not only the most thoughtful gift I’ve ever received but after my adoption paper, it’s also my most treasured gift.” Cammie assured Harry. “Because it was from you.”

Harry’s heart began to beat faster. “You mean that you wouldn’t have treasured it as much if it had come from your parents?”

“Yes but in a different way.” Cammie tried to explain how she felt about the chess set. “Because of what we went through together, it somehow feels extra special.” She groaned when Harry didn’t immediately respond. “Sorry, I’m not explaining it very well, am I?”

“On the contrary, you are.” Harry pulled Cammie closer.

Realizing what was about to happen, Cammie shut her eyes, her heart pounding as Harry’s mouth covered hers.

Harry quickly coaxed Cammie’s mouth open, his tongue sliding in to touch hers. He ended the kiss almost immediately when she jumped violently and reared away. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have done that.”

Cammie blushed. “It’s not that.”

Harry could see she looked uncomfortable. “Mie, it’s okay. Given what you said about the gift, I stupidly thought that it meant you liked me as more than just as a friend.”

“I’ve only ever really thought about you as a friend.” Cammie watched Harry’s face fall.

Harry let go. “At least now I know.”

Realizing that Harry had misunderstood her, Cammie hastily tried to tell him what she’d really meant. “No, Harry, it’s not that I haven’t wondered. It’s because I was your cousin, a lot younger than you, and I know what kind of girls you do like. So I never thought you’d like me like that, and that you’d never consider me as anything other than a friend.” Cammie blushed again, as she realized she was babbling.

Harry was now more than a little confused. “So you’re not upset that I kissed you?”

Her face redder than ever, Cammie shook her head. “No.”

“Then why did you pull away?” Harry asked.

“I’ve, err, never...” Cammie’s voice trailed away, as she couldn’t continue.

Harry’s mouth fell open. “You’ve never been kissed?”

“No.” Cammie suddenly felt upset.

Harry could hear the tears in the one word. “Mie, it’s okay. I just presumed that you’d been kissed before.”

Cammie felt horribly embarrassed to admit that she hadn’t. “I did like someone at school but then everything happened with Dominus, and I didn’t really get that sort of chance at Castrum House.”

Wanting to help Cammie to relax, and to be able to put her concerns about kissing behind her, Harry made a suggestion. “Let’s try it again. I’ll take it slower this time.”

Once more Cammie’s heart pounded as she closed her eyes. Harry restrained himself until he felt Cammie’s mouth loosen up under his. Only then did he repeat his earlier action. And this time, although Cammie didn’t react as violently, she still jumped. Harry again broke off from kissing, but this time to tell Cammie what to do. “When I kiss you, just copy me.”

Cammie bit her lip. “I’m awful, aren’t I?”

Harry smiled softly. “You’re better than I was with my first kiss.”

Cammie couldn’t resist asking. “Why? What happened?”

Even though he was embarrassed about it, Harry decided to tell Cammie about it so that she’d feel more comfortable. “It was with Emma Wordsworth during my third year.”

Cammie interrupted him as she recognized the name. “Hold on. Wasn’t she the head girl?”

“She was a fifth year then.” Harry told Cammie. “Anyway, I was so fierce I split her lip.”

Cammie giggled as Harry had hoped she would. “Did she let you kiss her again?”

Harry nodded. "I think she felt sorry for me." He then pulled a face. "Malfoy took the piss out of me for months afterwards."

Cammie had heard Harry talk about Malfoy a lot. "He really wasn't a good friend was he?"

"It depends how you view him." Harry went on unthinkingly. "My first time sleeping with someone only came about because of..." Harry trailed off.

Cammie was used to Harry being open with her. "Harry, I know you've slept with other girls. You didn't exactly hide the truth when we chatted at Castrum House."

"I know that but it's not something I'd normally discuss with someone I'm intending to date." Harry remarked wryly.

"You're intending to date me?" Cammie blurted out.

"If you'd like me to." Despite Cammie's kissing him back and her garbled explanation, Harry still wasn't sure how she really felt about him.

"You wouldn't expect to sleep with me, would you?" Cammie asked, a little concerned, as she recalled some of Harry's antics that he'd relayed to her.

Harry allayed her fears. "Not straightaway, and, I'll never do anything unless you want to."

Cammie hoped she didn't end their fledgling relationship with her next question. "And what if I say that I don't intend to sleep with anyone until I'm married?"

"Then that's what will happen." Harry wasn't going to blow things by saying anything different. "For now let's just take things one day at a time."

“Okay.” Plucking up her courage, Cammie kissed Harry briefly at the side of his mouth.

Harry knew that Cammie wouldn’t take things further if he didn’t, so he lowered his head, covering Cammie’s mouth again. As he had the first time he’d kissed her, Harry quickly coaxed her mouth open, his tongue seeking hers. Remembering what Harry had said, Cammie nervously copied Harry; tentatively at first but becoming bolder as she relaxed.

When they separated, Cammie returned to the abortive comment Harry had made. “So what were you going to say when you didn’t finish your sentence earlier?”

Harry frowned; while he hadn’t minded sharing his awful first kiss experience, he wasn’t sure that he wanted to discuss any more of his sexual encounters with Cammie now that she was going to be his girlfriend. “Why do you want to know?”

“Because I don’t want us to have secrets, Harry.” Cammie decided that she was going to ask Thomas to release her from her oath so that she could tell Harry what she’d done.

Harry thought about what his Dad had gone through because of his feelings for Sirius and the need to keep secrets, and he made the decision to be open with Cammie. “Okay then. I first slept with someone when I was fifteen.”

Cammie was hit with self-doubts. “So I must seem really lame.”

Harry disagreed. “Mie, it’s not a competition. Having attended Hogwarts you might remember what Slytherin House’s reputation was like.”

Cammie couldn’t but she’d heard enough from Harry during her incarceration to garner the bare bones. “Everyone was truly promiscuous?”

“Not everyone.” Harry grinned. “I couldn’t imagine anyone wanting to sleep with Greg Goyle or Vic Crabbe but if you were decent looking and up for it, then yes, there was some promiscuity.”

“So was your first time as awful as your first time kissing?” Cammie had by now been pulled back down onto the sofa that James favored, and was tucked under Harry’s arm as they talked.

Harry laughingly shook his head. “I doubt anything was that awful. But my first time certainly wasn’t my best experience but at the time it felt that way.”

“Who was it with?” Considering she hadn’t allowed herself to view Harry as anything but a friend up until then, Cammie was a little shocked to find that she was jealous that Harry had slept with anyone at all.

“Jasmine Patel.” Harry had had an awful crush on the seventh year Slytherin, which Draco had known about, and he’d decided to help Harry out. “I only found out afterwards that she slept with me because she owed Draco a substantial sum of money. It certainly took the shine off it.”

“I’d hate for something like that to happen to me.” Despite her newly discovered jealousy, Cammie felt sorry that Harry’s first time had been blighted like that. “Mum said that her religion meant that she only wanted to sleep with the man she loved and was married to, and I agree with her. So I shouldn’t have that kind of problem.” Cammie bravely went on. “Will you really not have a problem with us not sleeping together?”

As Cammie reiterated her intent, Harry realized that, as per his conversation with James on Christmas Day, Cammie truly would be out of bounds sexually. He sighed. If his and Cammie’s relationship worked out, it was going to be a longer drier spell for Harry than he’d endured already. “I don’t. And you should stick to your convictions, Mie. If that’s what you want, then you shouldn’t let anyone pressure you otherwise.” He grinned. “Not even me.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t.” Cammie returned the happy smile, and melted into his arms again.

A cough made Cammie jump, and she looked up find James standing over them. “Professor Potter. We were just...” Cammie stopped mid-sentence.

Leaning on his walking stick, James simply smiled. “I think I can see what you were doing. I take it Harry’s told you about your Uncle.”

“He has.” Cammie grinned at James. “Is Cassandra with him?”

“She is.” James confirmed, before deciding to make a slow but graceful exit. “I’ll leave you two alone.”

Cammie groaned and dropped her head onto Harry’s shoulder. “I bet he’s going to tell Dad.”

Harry hadn’t thought about that. “I hope not.”

Nerves suddenly got the better of Cammie. “Perhaps we’d better go back inside.”

“One more kiss.” Harry demanded. “Then we’ll go back.”

Her face pinkening again, Cammie closed her eyes as Harry resumed where he’d left off when his father had interrupted them.

As James walked out of the conservatory, he smiled as he thought about how pleased his son had looked. He just hoped that it meant as much to Cammie as it did to Harry.

25th February 2006

Cassandra nervously held Harry’s hand just after they apparated into Sirius’ house. “I’m nervous.”

“Don’t be.” Harry didn’t admit he was nervous as well, as Sirius walked out into the hallway. “Sirius.”

“You two look happy.” Sirius couldn’t mistake the happy glow that was coming from his daughter.

“You’re probably not going to be.” Cassandra decided to get it out in the open. “We’ve just gotten married.”

Faith, who’d been behind Sirius, gave a whoop. “Congratulations.”

As Faith hugged Harry, Cassandra looked worriedly at her Dad. “You’re not too angry are you?”

Sirius found he wasn’t entirely surprised. “Not at all, just a little disappointed.”

“It was a spur of the moment thing.” Cassandra explained. She lifted her hand where a gold band had joined her engagement ring. “At least I’ll know now for sure if anything happens to Harry again and likewise.”

Faith hugged her. “It was time he made an honest woman out of you anyway.”

Harry let Faith lead Cassandra off for a glass of champagne. “Sirius, I know you didn’t envisage Cassandra and I running off to the Ministry for a quickie wedding, so I was hoping we could do things properly this summer and have a second ceremony here.”

“I’d like that.” Sirius clapped Harry on the back. “And now I think a welcome and a warning are in order. Welcome to the family, and if you don’t take good care of my daughter, I’ll kill you, and do a far better job of it than Dominus did.”

“Noted, Sir.” Harry grinned happily as he went into the sitting room with Sirius to join their wives.

Next Chapter: Thomas acquires the final piece of the puzzle; Cammie's good intentions fall by the wayside.

Chapter 58: The Final Piece of the Puzzle

29th September 2006

Thomas stood in the middle of a clearing on the Potter Estate. It had once been the route a river had taken but it had been diverted to help with the irrigation of the wizarding farm next to it. No-one had been aware of the fact, until Regulus had extracted the public housing records from the Ministry after Thomas had failed to find anything in the areas Rupert had pinpointed on the Potter Estate the previous year. It had earned Regulus a hefty bonus, and Rupert a great deal of pain.

It was just after midnight when a cracking sound began, and not more than eight feet from where Thomas was standing, a large monolith rose up from the ground. Thomas walked over to it as he lit up his wand. Almost immediately he could see writing on the stone structure.

Tracing his fingers over it, he read what was written on it.

‘To take my treasure from inside

Place your hand onto the guide

Then in the void place the stone of might

And wait until night turns to day turns to night.’

Thomas was thankful that he'd had the foresight to bring with him all three of the physical items that existed in relation to the Pillars, just in case they were needed. After placing his hand onto the appendage shaped depression, he slotted the ruby into the hole that fitted it exactly. A sharp pain went through his hand as needles drove themselves into each of his fingers, before the depression vanished and Thomas' hand was pushed away. The monolith then sank back beneath the ground, taking the ruby with it.

Worried that he might do something to prevent him from gaining what he was after if he apparated away until nightfall, Thomas didn't dare

leave the area. Instead, he transfigured a stone into a comfortable chair and settled down to wait.

The moment the sun dipped below the horizon, a massive rumbling began at Thomas' feet, and a three foot high stone appeared with various writings on it, the ruby inset in the very center of it. After determining that he wouldn't need them, Thomas sent the Cartouches back via portkey before examining the stone in more detail. Like the monolith, it had a depression for a hand inset into it, and after placing his hand against it, Thomas once more experienced pain as needles pierced his skin. As before, his hand was then forced off the stone. A loud thud signified that the ruby had fallen away and Thomas picked it up, before replacing his hand on the stone and vanishing.

October 17th 2006

Aware that Thomas held a masters in potions, Severus, who'd taken over his stepson's teaching for his potions' minor, had asked Thomas if he wouldn't mind monitoring Harry while he was staying on the Island. Therefore Harry found himself spending the entire day brewing a tricky little potion that would provide pain relief to migraine sufferers when the standard pain potion didn't work.

Cammie, on the other hand, after completing her charms and defense homework that Thomas had also agreed to monitor during her stay, found herself in the dueling room practising some of the tougher spells that she'd learnt the previous day. It was almost time to finish when she aimed her wand at a glove. "Evello Revertio." She was delighted when the glove turned inside out the first time. "I don't see how this spell is a dark spell."

"It's origin is grounded in millinery." Thomas explained. "Hat makers used it to turn designs inside out after finishing the inner detail. When glovers discovered the hat makers' secret, they began to use the spell in the same way you have. However, one day someone accidentally got in the way of the spell turning them inside out, and a new dark spell was born."

Cammie shivered. "It's not a spell I'm ever going to use in that way."

"If someone else uses the spell, and you're quick enough in responding, you can counteract its effects with the same incantation." Thomas informed her. "So it's a handy spell to master."

"Do you think Dominus would ever use it?" Cammie aimed her wand at the glove again, once more having the same instantaneous result.

"Without a moment's misgiving." Thomas had used it before, and knew that he wouldn't hesitate to do so again. "Together with all of the spells that I've taught you so far."

"It's frightening some of the spells that are out there." As Cammie bent down to pick up the glove, the necklace she always wore slipped out, catching Thomas' attention. "I don't know how one human being can use them against another."

Instead of responding to Cammie's comments, Thomas reached over and took the necklace between his fingers, lifting it up. "Is this ring what I think it is?"

Cammie reddened, as she defended the item that Thomas had honed in on. "The spells we've been practising must have negated the invisibility charm I put on it." Cammie replaced the charm as she continued. "While I know Dominus gave it to me, and I shouldn't keep it because of that, I like it, and even though it sounds silly, I feel safe when I wear it." Despite her initial action of discarding the ring on Christmas Day, a few weeks later Cammie had found that she wanted to keep it by her. Aware that H.J. would disapprove, she'd invoked an invisibility charm on the ring, and had begun to wear it around her neck.

"Is it because it's a portkey?" Thomas knew why she felt safe, as when he'd been shown the ring by H.J. on New Year's Eve, he'd managed to imbue it with a very succinct comforting charm.

Cammie swallowed uncomfortably. "A little. But I doubt I'd use the portkey unless my life was in danger, and I really believed that I had nowhere else to turn."

"You're not worried he'd hurt you for escaping if you did?" Thomas wouldn't, but he needed to gauge Cammie's beliefs.

"Funnily enough, no, I'm not." Even though she was afraid of Dominus, Cammie didn't think he'd hurt her. "If he'd wanted to do that, he could have done it at Christmas; instead he returned Mitzy to me, and released the charm on the ring."

"You have a good point." Thomas thought back to the night he'd quietly invaded the Potter residence. "But he did threaten Harry that night."

"I know that, just as I know I'm supposed to hate him, and I do but..." Cammie stopped mid-sentence. "I can't explain it."

Thomas approached the subject from a different angle. "How did you feel when you heard Dominus had been hurt at the Museum?"

"Part of me wished he'd died, and another part of me felt guilty for doing so." As usual, Cammie had opened up to Thomas in a way that she didn't do with anyone else, not even her boyfriend. "If I'm really honest, I actually enjoyed some of the time we spent together talking."

Even though she was usually candid with him, Thomas could see it was still making Cammie feel uncomfortable admitting to having any feelings other than hatred for Dominus, and he sought to allay her discomfort. "Just because he's considered a tyrant doesn't mean that he's not also a person."

Cammie was mollified by Thomas' response. "I knew you'd understand. If I'd told Dad that, he'd have gone mad, especially given what happened to him."

"You resent Dominus for that, don't you?" Thomas holstered his wands, deciding they'd definitely finished for the day.

"Very much so but it was because of Dad that Orion Black cut off Dominus' arm, so I can see why he would seek the revenge he did." Cammie hadn't liked what Dominus had done but she'd seen the

symmetry behind Dominus' actions. "Which makes it all the more puzzling as to why he was so good to me."

"Perhaps he did genuinely like you." Thomas suggested, as it was the truth.

"Or perhaps as Dad and Uncle Harry suspect, he wanted to turn me." Cammie picked her lightweight sweatshirt up from off the floor. "It would have been the perfect revenge against Dad."

Thomas did want to turn her but it was more about Cammie's abilities, and wanting her on his side, rather than revenge. "Either way, I'm sure that Dominus would be impressed if he could see the standard you've reached now."

Cammie unconsciously fingered the necklace. "I doubt it as I intend to use it against him."

"You think you have a chance against him?" Thomas was surprised that Cammie thought she stood any sort of a chance if she went up against him.

Cammie laughed as she enlightened Thomas as to her meaning. "Not a snowball in hell's chance. I meant to fight against his men because I know its going to come down to that in the end; us against them."

"Don't you think you're a little young?" Thomas asked gently.

"Uncle Harry was Amicus' apprentice at fourteen, so no I don't." Cammie retorted. "And you said yourself I'm doing really well."

"You are." Thomas couldn't deny it. "In fact I'd go so far as to state that you'd make an excellent apprentice for Dominus himself."

Cammie disagreed. "I'm not powerful enough."

"But you have a natural affinity for the Dark Arts." Thomas had been surprised at how easily Cammie had mastered most of the spells he'd

asked her to, especially now that she was older. "And I'm quite certain he'd covet that."

"I bet he would." Cammie grinned at her Uncle. "But he isn't going to get the chance."

Thomas checked the time. "Mione should be arriving soon, so why don't we end our discussion here, and I'll let you go shower."

"Thanks, Uncle Thomas." Cammie kissed Thomas' cheek before leaving the room.

Thomas stood debating the conversation they'd just had, before apparating away to his rooms.

October 21st 2006

Cammie rolled over, relishing the feel of the sun on her skin. "Harry, will you put some more lotion on my back?"

"You're the only witch I know who doesn't use a spell." Harry nevertheless picked up the lotion and began to rub it into Cammie's skin.

Cammie giggled. "I like lotion better."

Harry knew why. "Minx."

"So you don't like rubbing it on for me?" Cammie's voice held amusement.

"You know I do." Harry's hand slid around Cammie's back and under her bikini top.

Cammie grabbed his hand, and pulled it away. "Harry! Anyone could come out."

As if to prove Cammie's words correct, Mione came rushing out onto the deck. "I'm off now. Will you two be okay alone?"

Cammie sat up. "I've got the portkey Uncle Thomas gave me." She lifted up the necklace that nestled between her cleavage. "What time will you be back?"

"Probably not until quite late." Mione brushed down her dress. "I've got to go. Thomas will kill me if I'm late."

Cammie laughed, having borne witness on more than one occasion during her stay as to how much Thomas loved his wife. "Uncle Thomas would jump off a building before he laid a finger on you, Aunt Mione."

Mione smiled back at her niece, acknowledging the truth behind her words. "I know that but these clients are very important, and this deal is going to be finalized over this dinner."

"Then you'd better go." Out of sight of Mione, Cammie kicked Harry where he was running his foot up her leg. "I'll probably have gone to bed when you get back."

Mione checked the time again and gave a small squeal. "I'll see you tomorrow then." She then activated her portkey and vanished.

Cammie swung on Harry. "Do you have to do that?"

Harry grabbed his girlfriend and pulled her down on top of him on the oversized lounge, before rolling them over. "Yes."

About to berate her boyfriend, Cammie found her mouth being otherwise occupied. Knowing that both Thomas and Mione wouldn't surprise them, and aware that the twins and Theresa were all in Sydney visiting Thomas' parents, this time when Harry pushed her bikini top aside to cup her breast, Cammie didn't stop him. At least until Harry's hand moved a lot lower. "Harry!"

Harry sighed and reluctantly moved his hand. "You can't blame me for trying."

Cammie smiled teasingly. "You mean I'm irresistible."

"No." Harry wasn't about to flatter her as she expected. "I was hoping that you'd think I was."

"You are." Cammie pulled Harry's head back down, and began to kiss him again, her hands wandering over his bare back. Even though she'd stopped Harry from going too far this time, Cammie and Harry had gone a lot further than that during the summer. And since she'd turned sixteen, it had been getting progressively more and more difficult for Harry not to try and take advantage during his encounters with Cammie.

Cammie could feel Harry's hands on the move again, and she gave a tiny moan as Harry's fingers circled her aureole, her nipple hardening almost immediately. Harry then moved to her other breast plying it with the same insistent but pleasurable attention he had with the first. Soon Cammie couldn't take it any longer and she arched against Harry, trying to assuage the ache in the very spot that she'd refused to let Harry explore. The two kissed again and again, and Cammie continued to squirm against Harry, as she mobilized her hands to push his swimming shorts down over his hips so that she could caress his backside.

Meanwhile, Harry had begun to caress the top of Cammie's leg, before moving his hand back upwards and tugging open the bow that held her bikini bottom fastened together. Half-expecting Cammie to protest again, he was surprised when she just continued to kiss and caress him instead. When they parted for air, Harry kissed her breast, his hand having graduated across Cammie's stomach until it lay just above her pubic bone.

"Please, Harry." Cammie's voice was trembling as Harry's hand stilled, both from the nerves she still experienced when Harry touched her there, and from need.

Harry gently trailed his fingertips over Cammie's stomach once more before moving his hand lower, feeling Cammie tense as he began to caress the spot that ached. "Just relax."

Cammie did as Harry ordered, and a short time later she was crying out. Panting, she held tightly onto Harry, opening her mouth as Harry began to kiss her again. As Harry's hands caressed her back and bottom, Cammie could feel the same need that had just been dealt with, growing again. This time, however, when she wriggled against Harry, she found that her bikini bottom had deserted her, the single bow that had been holding it together, having given up the ghost under her persistent wriggling. Having tugged his shorts down far lower than she realized, Cammie could feel the warmth of Harry's arousal rubbing against her, and her stomach jumped as sensations more intense than those she'd experienced earlier, filled her.

Cammie's soft moans and writhing were making Harry feel as though he was going to explode, and he groaned loudly when Cammie pressed herself again him. Beneath him, Cammie almost unconsciously shifted so that Harry found himself cradled between her parted legs as she strove to get closer to him. Cammie cried out as the movement forced her even harder against Harry, who too moaned again at the increased pressure.

Feeling the same shaking as she had earlier begin again, Cammie cupped Harry's bottom, and muffled her own cries by kissing him. Cammie's insistent wriggling against his arousal had pushed Harry to his very limits, and as her tongue frantically tangled with his, Harry's self-control vanished like fog under a hot sun.

As Harry slid into her, Cammie abruptly ended their kiss, hissing through her teeth at the stinging sensation Harry's actions had caused, and she pushed at Harry's chest. "Don't move."

"I wasn't going to." Harry gritted his teeth as he said it, feeling Cammie continue to contract around him as she shifted trying to get more comfortable.

"It feels strange." But even as she said it, Cammie began to adjust to the feeling.

Harry had, among other things, thought the same thing the first time he'd had sex. "It won't last long." Then, as he felt Cammie relaxing around him, and unable to wait any longer, Harry began to move.

Cammie took several deep breaths as Harry began to make love to her, and she wrapped her arms around him, surprised to feel how much he was quivering as his mouth nuzzled her neck. As inexperienced as she was, Cammie knew from their experimenting over the summer that Harry was already probably close to the edge, and she whispered softly to him. "It's okay, Harry."

At Cammie's gentle words, Harry gave in, and burying himself as deep as he could, he groaned loudly as his body began to shake. As he did so, he could feel Cammie's hand stroking his back, and she continued to whisper softly to him, telling him she loved him. Harry didn't move until his breathing returned to normal. When he did, he lifted his head, and rolled off Cammie to grab his wand.

"What is it?" Cammie was a little stunned by Harry's abrupt release of her.

"Contraceptive spell." Harry turned his wand on Cammie and cast one.

Cammie's hand flew to her mouth. "I didn't even think about it."

"I wasn't exactly intending to make love to you, so there was no reason to." Harry put down his wand. "I only remembered because I have no wish to be shark bait."

Aware of what Harry was referring to, Cammie giggled as she remembered what her Dad had said to Thomas before he'd left. "You have to admit that it was hilarious the way that Dad threatened Uncle Thomas that if something happened to me, he'd end up swimming with the sharks."

Harry, however, didn't laugh. "I think he was serious, Mie. He made the same threat to me if I laid a finger on you."

Cammie smiled ruefully. "He's a little too late, I think."

Harry sighed. "I'm sorry, Mie. I should have asked first."

Cammie snuggled up against Harry as he put his arm around her shoulders. "It doesn't matter, Harry."

"But I know you wanted to wait until you were married." Harry stroked Cammie's back, feeling guilty that he'd put his needs first.

Cammie had but she also knew that it had been a pipe dream. "Harry, I did, but we both know that that was unlikely to happen. When I said it I hadn't even been kissed, let alone be aware of how hard it would be to wait that long."

Harry had to admit that her statement was true but he still felt the need to apologize again. "I am sorry though."

"But you're not sorry that we..." Cammie was interrupted as Harry jumped in to attest that he wasn't.

"Never." Harry kissed her forehead. "I just wish it had been better for you."

"I never expected my first time to be music and fireworks." Cammie assured Harry, even though that was exactly what she'd hoped for.

"I promise it will be better next time." Harry felt a little embarrassed that his lovemaking had been rather short-lived, and most definitely for his benefit alone. "If you want there to be a next time that is."

"Yes." Cammie didn't hesitate in her response.

Harry frowned as she shivered. "Are you cold?"

"A little." The wind had picked up, and it was only then that Cammie realized how exposed they were, and she decided that she'd better go inside. "I'm actually going to take a shower."

Harry grabbed a towel from the side of him, and passed it to Cammie. "I'll see you at dinner then."

Even though they'd just made love, and Harry had seen her naked before, Cammie suddenly shy and gratefully held the towel against her body as she climbed to her feet. "I won't be long."

Now that Cammie was no longer there, feeling exposed himself, Harry pulled up his shorts. Unlike Cammie he didn't have apparition rights, and so he set off on foot for his room.

The Next Morning

Harry sat on Thomas' plane, his face green as he vomited into a bag.

Cammie frowned at her boyfriend. "I thought you liked flying." They'd portkeyed to the Island but Cammie had jumped at the opportunity to return via the beloved aircraft.

Harry scowled at his girlfriend. "On a broomstick I do." It was all he could get out as he started to vomit again.

Thomas was highly amused. "You'd think you were related to Cassandra. She's a terrible flier too."

Harry didn't dare snap out a sarcastic response to his host; not that he was sure he could anyway. Cammie rubbed his back. "It's probably just because the weather's so bad."

Mione had a different opinion. "It could be from all the potion ingredients he's been inhaling over the last month."

Cammie disagreed. "Harry's used to potion ingredients. But he's never flown before, especially in weather this bad." She looked wistfully at her Uncle. "I'm not going to be able to fly the plane, am I?" Cammie had begged Thomas to allow her to take the controls on the way home.

“I’m afraid not.” Thomas confirmed Cammie’s assumption. “Roger has enough to deal with during this kind of weather without playing nursemaid to us.”

As the plane bounced up and down during the storm, Harry gave another loud groan. Cammie sighed heavily. “May we portkey home, Uncle Thomas? I don’t think Harry’s enjoying this.”

“I think that’s for the best.” Thomas got up and hugged his niece, who like him and Mione, was totally unperturbed by the motion of the aircraft.

After Mione had hugged her as well, Cammie operated the portkey.

Covent Garden

Cassandra glanced up at the noise from the hallway. Hurrying out she found Cammie and Harry, who still vomiting into a bag. “Harry didn’t like the flying?”

Cammie shook her head as she wrapped her arm around her boyfriend as they walked into the sitting room. “The weather was really bad.”

Cassandra shuddered. “I can totally sympathize.” She placed a hand on Harry’s shoulder. “I’ll get you something for the nausea.”

Harry swiftly downed the potion on Cassandra’s return, his stomach quickly beginning to settle. “Thanks, Cassandra.”

“Will Uncle Harry still be back on Tuesday?” Harry and Cammie were both going to be staying with Cassandra for a few days while Harry was away, both of them enjoying access to the Muggle television and movies that the Sebastians owned. Up until then, Cassandra had been staying with her Dad; Harry not wanting her to be alone while he was in the US.

“Tuesday night.” Cassandra confirmed.

Cammie sighed. "I was hoping that I could use his pensieve. He said that as a belated birthday treat I could show Harry some memories of playing quidditch at Berowra." She glanced at Harry who had his eyes closed and was leaning back against the sofa.

Cassandra was aware of her husband's offer. "The pensieve is here, so I'm happy to supervise you if you want to use it. But it will have to be today as H.J. is borrowing it tomorrow for one of his lessons." Even though H.J. had successfully completed the Auror training, including the obstacle course by use of a field dressing, H.J.'s injury had meant that he'd had to eschew fieldwork. Instead he had begun to teach basic defense at BritAD, freeing up time for both Harry and Cassandra.

Cammie's face lit up as she had an idea. "Actually can I show Harry something different than I was going to?"

"What would you like to show him?" Cassandra got up, intending to get the pensieve from the bedroom.

"Because the weather was so bad today, I couldn't fly the plane." Cammie looked hopefully at her aunt. "So could I show Harry my memory of flying it before? I know you haven't seen it either."

Harry felt his stomach go over at just the thought of it. "No."

Cammie turned to Harry. "You don't want to see?"

Harry shook his head. "Not right now, Mie. Perhaps some other time."

Cassandra sat back down. "I can't say that I'm entirely upset about it. I'm not sure how I'd do watching that either, even in a memory."

Harry flashed Cassandra a grateful look. "If I never see an aircraft again, it won't be too soon."

Cammie pouted. "Harry, I don't know when I'll get the chance to show you in future."

Harry knew that Cammie would keep on about it if he didn't make some sort of effort. "Mie, I promise that I'll watch it at some point but I'd rather undergo the Cruciatus than watch it right now."

After Harry's rather drastic statement, Cammie subsided. "I understand." She turned to Cassandra. "Can we watch a movie instead?"

"Don't tell me. Revenge of the Sith." Cassandra guessed.

A shiver of guilt went down Cammie's back as she thought about what she'd been doing on the Island when Harry had been studying potions, and she shook her head. "I was thinking about watching Love Actually."

Harry knew that any protest he might make would be lost as Cassandra's face lit up. "I'll make some popcorn. And I've got soda in the fridge."

As the three of them began to prepare to have the full movie experience, none of them realized that if Harry had agreed to watch Cammie's memory with her and Cassandra, it would have revealed what the 'FBW' was that the mystery man in St. Mungo's kept repeating. And they might have been spared the trauma of what was about to happen to Cammie.

3rd November 2006

Thomas put down his napkin. "That was a wonderful meal, Cassandra."

"Harry cooked it." Cassandra smiled at her husband. "I can just about boil water."

"You don't use house-elves, do you?" Thomas had noticed a lack of them in the couple's apartment.

“This place is far too small, and my mother was an excellent cook, so I picked this up from her.” Harry got up and started clearing away the plates.

Mione smiled affectionately as she remembered Nia. “Her blueberry muffins are still the best I’ve ever had.”

“The tarte tatin was one of her recipes.” Harry told them as he put the dishes in the sink and ran hot water over them. “Would anyone like a liqueur?”

“I’ll take a scotch on the rocks.” Thomas answered after Cassandra and Mione both refused, deciding to share a pot of tea instead.

Once they were all seated in the living area of the apartment, Thomas let the conversation drift back and forth for a while until Cammie’s name was mentioned. “This is going to sound a bit strange but have you noticed how tense Cammie is lately? When I was tutoring her on Thursday, she seemed agitated. And it wasn’t the first time.” Thomas knew that the others would believe he was discussing the charms that he’d offered to teach Cammie in lieu of her returning to Berowra; something neither she nor her parents wanted in the current climate.

Harry, who hadn’t spent much time around his niece lately, shook his head. “Not really.”

Cassandra, who’d been giving Cammie lessons in defense techniques as well as arithmancy, on the other hand nodded. “Yesterday I was early for our lesson, and she obviously didn’t hear me arriving, and jumped out of her skin. At the time I didn’t think anything of it, but in retrospect, she looked terribly guilty.”

Mione frowned, and jumped to the conclusion that Thomas had expected his wife to. “You don’t think she’s been practicing Dark Art spells again, do you?”

Cassandra, however, shook her head. “Her eyes would have been black.”

Harry glanced at Thomas. "Do you think she might have?"

"I couldn't say." Thomas responded. "But Cassandra does have a good point about the eyes."

Harry disagreed. "If Cammie's been practicing them enough, she'd overcome that. It's not a permanent effect."

"Harry, she has someone with her for lessons five days a week." Cassandra pointed out. "And during the evenings and at the weekends she and Harry Potter are always together. How would she be able to spend enough time to practice without being found out?"

"I don't know." Harry admitted.

Mione did. "What about at night? It's what I'd do."

Thomas deliberately backpedaled. "I think we're being a little hard on the girl. I was just concerned that she might be worried about something; not hinting that she's reverted to practicing the Dark Arts again."

Harry decided that he needed to make sure otherwise. "You're right, but it still wouldn't hurt to make sure."

"What will you do?" Thomas asked, his goal now achieved.

"Arrive at the dueling room well before Cammie does and watch from a distance." Harry decided.

The conversation then moved onto other things until just before midnight, Thomas and Mione left.

Three days later

Cammie hummed happily to herself as she opened the door to the dueling room. After checking it was firmly closed, she walked to the middle of the room. "Excorio."

Under his invisibility cloak, Harry and Cassandra didn't initially make any moves but waited until Cammie's spells began to get progressively darker. Only then did Harry drop the cloak. "Hello, Cammie."

Next Chapter: Harry's intervention has unfortunate results

Chapter 59: A Fall From Grace

“Uncle Harry.” Cammie’s voice shook as it had in the same way when Thomas had caught her practising on the Island. “Aunt Cassandra.”

“I thought you’d be strong enough to resist the temptation, but obviously I was wrong.” Harry held out his hand. “Wands.”

Cammie backed up, and shook her head. “You can’t have them.” It was a moment of déjà vu for Cammie when, as she had with Thomas, she found herself wandless as Harry unholstered his own wand, and summoned hers. “It’s not fair. I’m not hurting anyone.”

“You’re hurting yourself.” Harry picked up his cloak and folded it as he walked towards Cammie. “Continual use of the Dark Arts will twist you into someone you won’t recognize.”

Thinking about Thomas, Cammie refuted Harry’s statement. “You’re wrong.”

“Come with me.” Harry grabbed Cammie’s arm. “Cass, our apartment.”

Having little choice, Cammie went with Harry as he apparated them both to his apartment. “Why are we here?”

“I have something to show you.” After changing the wards to stop Cammie apparating out, Harry went into the bedroom.

Cammie wasn’t surprised when Harry returned with his pensieve, but she was more concerned about who was going to find out what she’d done rather than what Harry was going to show her. “Are you going to tell Harry and Dad?”

“Yes.” Harry immediately responded. “But don’t worry, they’ll understand.”

Cammie watched Harry drop several memories into the pensieve. "Harry's going to kill me."

Harry frowned as he detected something more than just worry. "Harry knows you've been practicing?"

Cammie nodded her head. "Yes, I told him that I had when we first got together but I promised him I'd stop."

"In that case, I imagine he's going to be angry but he loves you, and he'll get over it." Harry held out his hands to both Cassandra and Cammie. "Come on."

Inside the pensieve, Cammie found herself standing in a room that looked vaguely familiar. "Where are we?"

"Sirius Black's house." Harry informed her. "The one from my world."

First Memory

"Harry!" A small girl ran over to Harry and hugged him. "Will you play with me?"

"I think Harry should be allowed to say hello to your mother before you jump on him." A male voice came from the hallway.

"Daddy." The girl immediately left Harry, and hurled herself into the arms of the dark-haired man standing in the doorway.

Sirius swung his daughter into his arms, and kissed her cheek noisily. "Have you been good for your mother?"

"Yes but Anna hasn't." Cassie spilled the beans on her older sister.

"You shouldn't tell tales, Cassie." Sirius remonstrated as he kissed the red-haired woman who'd moved to join him.

"Sorry, Daddy." Cassie didn't look too upset though.

Lily let go of Sirius waist to hug Harry. "I'm afraid that Anna is in disgrace in her room."

"Where's Orion?" Harry asked after his younger brother.

"Reading in his room." Lily kept her arm around Harry's shoulder. "He probably doesn't realize what time it is."

Sirius put down his daughter. "So I take it that Anna has been playing up again?"

Lily nodded. "She ended up fighting with Cassie, even though Cassie did nothing to incite her."

Sirius sighed. "She can eat dinner in her room tonight, and I'll speak to her tomorrow." He ruffled Harry's hair. "Are your sisters the same?"

Harry shook his head. "They get along pretty well, and Dudley and I never argue."

"Mum, when is Harry..." Orion stopped mid-question when, on entering the room, he spotted Harry. "Hi Harry."

"Hi Orion." Harry hugged his younger brother. "Sirius said you wanted me to help you with some of your schoolwork."

"Yes, please." Orion smiled adoringly at his brother. "I'm stuck on a charms problem."

Sirius moved to the sofa and patted it. "Come and sit down, Harry. You can help Orion a little later."

Present time

Cammie watched as the memory continued to play out, showing what appeared to be a picture perfect homelife. When the memory ended ten minutes later, she questioned her Uncle. "Why show me that?"

“Because it’s important that you see it for comparison.” Harry dispelled the final frozen image of the memory, leaving them standing in a mist. “Tell me what you thought about that Sirius and his family.”

“He and Lily seemed very happy.” Cammie observed. “And he obviously loved his children. He seemed like the perfect husband and father.”

“You’re right, he did.” Harry confirmed Cammie’s estimation of the situation. “I’m now going to show you a memory relating to his time as Amicus.”

Cammie had never been shown any of Harry’s memories of Amicus or the deeds Harry had carried out as the man’s apprentice, as both H.J. and Hermione hadn’t felt it was necessary. Cammie was, however, aware that Sirius Black had been Amicus and what that meant, and also that Harry had been his apprentice. “I thought I didn’t need to see those memories.”

Harry, however, felt that it was important now given what she’d been doing. “You do now. The memory you’re about to see was from one of my training days.” He then started the memory.

Second memory

“Hello, Harry.” Sirius locked the door to the training room, and removed his mask. “Have you been practising the Cruciatus spell as I told you to?”

“Yes.” Harry removed his own mask, and headed to stand in the middle of the room.

“Show me.” Sirius stood with his arms crossed.

Harry took a deep breath and aimed his wand at Sirius. “Crucio.”

His wand flying into his hand, Sirius batted the spell away. “Pathetic, Harry. Do it again.”

Cammie watched as for more than twenty minutes Harry was forced to repeat the spell again and again, each time Sirius denigrating his efforts, until exhausted, Harry collapsed to his knees. "I can't go on."

Sirius marched over, grabbed Harry's hair and pulled him up. "We stop when I say we stop."

Harry shook his head. "I can't."

Sirius released Harry's hair. "Perhaps a demonstration is in order. This is how you do it, Harry. Crucio."

As Harry began screaming, Cammie stopped the memory, and made a comment about something she found disturbing. "You don't look any older in this memory than the first one."

"I'm not." Harry ended the memory entirely, and indicated they should leave the pensieve. "The happy family scenario took place just a few weeks before this one."

"Did you know who he was then?" Cammie asked.

Harry nodded. "I had a part to play though, and I played it."

"So what's your point in showing me this?" Even though it had been less than an hour since she'd been parted from her wands, Cammie was already starting to feel irritable.

Cassandra answered her to allow Harry to return the pensieve to the bedroom. "To show you what happens to someone who is, or should I say was, essentially once a good person. That Sirius only became what he was after learning the Dark Arts. He was totally twisted; presenting one face to the world, and another to those like Harry."

"But I'm not like that." Cammie argued. "Nor will I ever be."

"You're already deceitful and underhanded, Cammie. You've lied to us, to your parents, and to Harry." Harry remarked as he walked back into the room. "You never used to be that way."

"I've only been doing the spells to protect my family. Harry knows that." Cammie had never hidden her intent from her boyfriend; just that she'd continued when she'd told him she'd stopped.

"But he doesn't know you took up the practice again, does he?" Harry challenged his niece's declaration.

Cammie had to admit that she'd been wrong to do so. "I know I shouldn't have lied to Harry but if I'd been allowed to practice the spells openly, I wouldn't have had to."

"You'd fall even quicker if you were allowed to do so." Cassandra took the girl's hand. "We need to get you home now."

Cammie pulled free. "You hate me, don't you?"

"Paranoia is another symptom." Harry realized that the problem was worse than he thought.

It was a mark of how deeply immersed in the Dark Arts she now was, that after such a short time Cammie could already feel the pull from her lack of wands, unlike when she'd gone through her first withdrawal. "I need my wands, Uncle Harry."

"No." Harry immediately refused, and wrapped his fingers around his niece's arm. "As Cass just said, we're taking you home now."

Cammie couldn't shake off Harry's grip, and she found herself back in the hallway at the Potter house. "Get off me."

Harry could feel panic, hatred, and need rolling off Cammie, and knowing that H.J. was still likely to be at home, called out loudly. "H.J., get out here if you're in."

H.J. limped slowly out of the sitting room where he'd been reading, the single crutch he favored bearing his weight. "I was just about to leave for BritAD. Is this important?"

"Yes. Cammie's going to have to go through withdrawal again." Harry tossed her wands to H.J.

H.J. looked askance at his daughter, as he slipped the wands into the holster next to his own. "Cammie? Is it true?"

"Yes." Cammie answered quietly as Harry let go of her arm.

"You're grounded for the next three months." H.J. decided he needed to come down hard on his daughter. "Your theoretical flying instructions with Thomas will come to an end; there will be no trips to the Island, and unless it is for lessons, you'll not be seeing Harry."

"I hate you." Cammie cried out before turning on her heel and fleeing.

"Don't forget that she's probably got the custom-made wand that Thomas bought her for birthday in her room." Harry warned, as it hadn't been one of the two wands that Harry had confiscated from Cammie.

H.J. apparated directly into Cammie's room, beating her there as she headed upstairs on foot. "Accio Cammie's wand." A beautifully carved wand flew into his hand.

Seconds later Cammie opened the door, her face turning ugly as she saw what H.J. had in his hand. "Give me that."

"Why did you do it, Cammie?" H.J. asked, as he holstered the wand with the others.

"Because I need to you protect you all." Cammie gave H.J. the reason for her fall.

"Cammie, it's not your job to do that." H.J. knew his next words were going to upset his daughter as much as the sanctions he'd just imposed on her. "And once you've gone through withdrawal, you'll only be allowed your wands under supervision."

He was right, as Cammie's dismay showed on her face. "You can't do that."

"As you're underage, yes I can." H.J. reminded her of the handicap her adolescence imposed. "And, just like you believe that what you've been doing will protect us, I'm only doing this to try and safeguard you."

"No, you're not." Cammie screamed at him, her need for her wands beginning to really get to her. "You're only doing it because you can't fight anymore. You're jealous of what I can do."

H.J. felt hurt lance through him at Cammie's words, but he knew that it wasn't really how Cammie felt. "I'm not jealous of anyone who practices the Dark Arts, Cammie."

"I don't believe you." With that, Cammie turned away, and headed out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

Downstairs, Harry heard Cammie's footsteps hurrying up the hallway, and another door slamming. He suddenly realized something. "Dammit. The upstairs floo." He apparated to the upper level floo room just in time to see the green flames die down, and he immediately cast a location spell. "Locus Camille Sebastian."

Cassandra, who'd stopped to alert H.J. of Harry's suspicions that Cammie had flooed out, burst into the room. "Where has she gone?"

"Diagon Alley." Harry sighed. "She's probably heading for Ollivanders."

"Let's go." H.J. hobbled up to the couple. "Cammie can't be allowed to run around Diagon Alley in the state she was beginning to get in."

Harry discovered that his niece wasn't as stupid as to head for the wandmakers, not detecting any sign of her there. He warned Ollivander not to sell a wand to Cammie under any circumstances. "Split up."

After searching Diagon Alley and the surrounding less attractive thoroughfares, Cassandra finally found Cammie in Ollivanders three hours' later, a barrier protecting the wands Cammie so desperately wanted. "Cammie, he can't sell you anything." She held out her hand. "Come here."

Cammie was by now white and sweating profusely, and reared away like a frightened animal. "I want my wands. I have to have my wands."

"You can't have them." Cassandra's voice was firm but gentle. "I'm going to take you home."

"I'm not going with you." Taking several steps backwards, Cammie found herself backed up against a solid invisible wall, the wands out of her reach behind it. "I was right. You hate me. If you cared, you'd give me a wand."

"I love you, Cammie." Cassandra stepped forward. "It's why I can't give you a wand."

"Get away from me." Cammie screamed as she curled up into a defensive ball. "Don't touch me."

In his office, Thomas' master ring began to vibrate, and he immediately dropped what he was doing and apparated out.

Cammie burst into tears as Thomas appeared just in front of Cassandra, and she poured out her woes. "Uncle Harry took my wands and gave them to Dad, Uncle Thomas."

Cassandra spoke up. "As we suspected, she's been practicing Dark Arts again, Thomas."

"I thought she was in trouble." Thomas explained his sudden appearance. "She set off the ring that warns me if she's in danger."

"She just thinks she is." Cassandra said in a low voice. "The sooner I get her home, the better."

When he didn't do anything to stop Cassandra from coming closer, Cammie turned betrayed eyes on Thomas. "You're just like her. How could you? I thought out of everyone you'd understand. But none of you understand."

"Cammie, you're wrong. I do understand." Thomas started to walk forward.

"Get away from me." Cammie again screamed out her earlier comment, curling up even tighter as if to hide herself from the pair.

Cassandra touched Thomas' arm to stop him. "Let me deal with her."

Just as Cassandra's hand was about to close in on her shoulder, Cammie was enveloped by a panic like none she'd ever experienced before. "No. I can't go through it again. I just can't." And in sheer desperation and fear, Cammie used the last option open to her, and quietly uttered two words that no-one else caught.

Cassandra couldn't help but swear as the girl vanished. "Fuck. H.J.'s going to kill me."

Thomas was a little surprised by Cassandra's language. "Do you know where she's gone?"

"She has an emergency portkey to the Island, doesn't she?" Cassandra assumed that that was where Cammie had fled to.

Thomas nodded, but he had a feeling that that wasn't where their niece had gone. "Yes. I'll portkey out now. If she's on the Island, I'll floo you. If not, it's going to be several hours before I can return." Even as he said it, Thomas knew he had no intention of portkeying to the Island.

Thomas disappeared, and Cassandra turned around as Harry and H.J. came into the store. "She was here but she's portkeyed out somewhere. Thomas is checking the Island. If she's there, he'll floo us."

Harry was seriously concerned. "She could hurt someone, Cass. Why didn't you stop her?"

"She vanished just as I reached out for her." Cassandra defended herself.

"You should have stunned her." H.J. snapped, worry fueling his anger. "I'm going home to wait for Thomas' call."

H.J. had only just apparated in, when Thomas' head appeared in the fireplace. "Is she with you?"

Thomas shook his head. "She's not on the Island. I'm going to stay where I am for the time being."

"Thanks for checking." H.J. ran a hand through his hair. "Where the hell is she?"

"No luck?" Harry and Cassandra appeared behind him.

"None." H.J. was now beside himself.

"Perhaps Harry might know." Cassandra suggested.

"I might know what?" Harry Potter came ambling down the stairs, yawning.

"Where Cammie is." H.J. limped as quickly as he could towards the stairs. "She's been practising the Dark Arts again. Did you help her?"

"No." The young man denied it immediately. "I haven't cast a Dark Arts spell since my withdrawal."

H.J.'s face reflected his disbelief. Harry held up his hand. "He's telling the truth, H.J." He turned to the young man. "She's portkeyed somewhere, and it's not to the Island. Do you have any idea where?"

“Of course not.” Harry Potter couldn't think of where else Cammie would portkey to.

Even though he was aware that the young man was again being truthful, Harry could discern that he was holding something back. “What aren't you telling us?”

In light of the situation, Harry Potter knew he was going to have to break his promise to his girlfriend. “Cammie told me that she'd taken up practising again. But she also told me that she'd told someone else what she was doing, and they were helping her to deal with the problem. As she was taking defense lessons with her, I just presumed it was Cassandra and that she'd help Cammie, and I therefore believed Cammie when she told me she'd stopped.”

“Why the fuck didn't you tell me?” H.J. dropped his crutch to shake the boy.

“Because I thought that Cassandra knew, and I promised Cammie I wouldn't.” Harry believed in keeping his promises. “I'm sorry.”

“She didn't tell me.” Cassandra eliminated herself from the list of people who could have helped Cammie. “So who do you think she told?”

Given her continued practice of the Dark Arts, and the use of a portkey by Cammie to flee to an unknown destination, Harry jumped to the only logical conclusion he could about who his niece had trusted. “Dominus springs to mind.”

“You fucking little idiot.” H.J. snarled at Harry Potter. “If what Harry thinks is true, it means she's gone to him.”

Harry pulled his brother off the unprotesting young man. “H.J., it isn't Harry's fault, and we don't know that she's gone to him.”

“But if she has, why would she do so after escaping with Harry?” Cassandra couldn't see why her niece would have done something so terrible.

"I have no idea." Harry too was wondering what would possess his niece to turn to a man she'd professed to hate. "But right now what I do know is that she'll do anything to get a wand. And he's probably the only person who will give her one. I'll alert BritAD to be on the lookout for her, but I've got a horrible feeling, we'll hear from him before we find her."

Harry Potter slid to the floor now that he'd been released, blaming himself as much as H.J. was. "I should have noticed. But I truly believed her when she told me she'd stopped." He ran a hand through his hair. "Why didn't she trust me? Why go to him?"

Cassandra slid down next to him. "We don't know yet that she has. But as Harry said, she knows he'll give her a wand."

"I'm going to check something." As Cassandra comforted Cammie's boyfriend, H.J. apparated upstairs before returning moments later. "The portkey ring has gone."

"Then that answers the question as to where she has gone." Harry swore. "Fuck it; I should have destroyed it."

"It's too late to worry about that now." Cassandra consoled her husband.

Harry Potter glanced up. "So what do we do now?"

Castrum House

As the four adults discussed their next moves, Cammie found herself alone in a once familiar room. She wasn't alone for long, as less than five minutes after she'd arrived, a gold masked individual walked into the room. Curled up in a ball, and holding her head as pain began to lance through it, Cammie found herself pleading with the man. "Help me."

Thomas knelt down and held out his hand to the shivering girl. "I'll help you in exchange for something."

“Anything.” Cammie thought she was going to go mad if she didn’t get a wand soon. Her heart was beating faster than it ever had before; her aching body shook as though she was cold but in truth she felt as though she was burning up; and she was struggling against a roiling stomach.

“Join me and I’ll help you.” Thomas continued to hold out his hand. “All you’ve got to do is to take my hand.”

“No.” In contradiction of her statement that she'd do anything, Cammie refused. Moments later she lost her battle with her stomach.

Thomas cleaned up the mess, before issuing a warning. “It’s only going to get worse, Cammie. Soon the pain in your head is going to make it feel as if it’s about to explode, and your blood is going to feel as though it’s boiling.” He unholstered a wand. “If you join me, I’ll give this wand to you.” He then held out his empty hand. “All you have to do is take my hand, Cammie, and the pain will be over.”

“I can’t.” Cammie began to cry uncontrollably. “Please help me.”

“Then take my hand.” Thomas moved closer.

Cammie reached out before pulling back her hand. “I can’t. I can’t.”

Thomas knew she was close to cracking, and he addressed one of her fears. “I know you’re afraid of taking the Dark Mark, but I can adapt your ring.” Thomas didn’t say that it would only be a temporary measure as the rings didn’t retain the Dark Mark for a long period of time. “No-one else will give you a wand, Cammie. Join me and I will.”

Cammie still resisted as she wept in pain. “Please don’t ask me to do that.”

Thomas adopted a gentle, coaxing tone. “If you take my hand, I’ll let you return home once you’ve joined me.” Thomas knew that Cammie wouldn’t think about the fact that she’d be forced to go through withdrawal if she did; her main focus currently on obtaining a wand.

As badly as she wanted the wand, Cammie still hesitated, and she wailed her response at him. "Why do you want me?"

"Because you have untapped potential that I want on my side." Thomas answered honestly.

Even though every fiber in her body was screaming at her to take Thomas' hand, Cammie still held out. "I won't join you." Then, as Thomas had warned, Cammie began to feel as though liquid hot magma was flowing through her veins making her scream out in agony, and unable to take any more, she reached out.

As her hot hand slid into his, Thomas immediately pulled Cammie to her feet. After snaking his arm around Cammie's waist to hold her upright, he slid the proffered wand into her hand. "Cast a spell, Cammie."

Cammie was shaking so hard by now that she could barely hold the wand, and was relieved when Thomas' free hand tightened around hers. "Venenum."

Thomas then let go of her hand, and unholstered his other wand, dispelling the spell. "Another, Cammie."

After casting four spells, Cammie collapsed in Thomas' arms, and he carried her over to the sofa. "I need your ring, Cammie."

Cammie shakily lifted her hand to her neck and slipped off her necklace before passing it to Thomas. "Will it hurt?"

"No." Thomas tapped the ring with his wand. "Morsmordre."

Cammie watched in horrid fascination as the ring glowed black and red, before reverting to its natural silver state. "What now?"

Thomas placed it in her hand. "You have to put it on your finger of your own free will."

"And if I don't?" Cammie closed her fist over the ring.

“Cammie, I can easily take back my wand, and you can go home.” Thomas wasn’t going to force her. “It’s up to you. I didn’t order you to come here, and I didn’t compel you to accept my offer.” He reached for a pillow and tapped it. “Portus. If you want to go, then hand me the wand, and I’ll give you this portkey.”

Having second thoughts about what she'd done, Cammie handed over the wand. "Give me the pillow."

Thomas stood over her, the pillow in his hand. "If you want it, then take it. But just remember how it's going to feel when you go through withdrawal again."

Cammie's hand wavered as Thomas' words sank in. After what she'd just gone through, the terror of having to go through withdrawal again almost overwhelmed her. The more she thought about it, the more she began to feel as if she couldn't breathe, as panic ripped through her at the prospect of the gnawing hunger she knew would accompany the withdrawal. Just like a drug addict, Cammie found herself unable to face withdrawal again, and she therefore lowered her hand. Hating herself even as she did it, she instead slid the ring onto her finger. "I want to go home now." As Thomas had suspected, Cammie was still distracted enough to not be thinking clearly.

“ We haven't finished yet, Cammie.” Thomas fished a vial of painkilling potion out of his pocket, and handed her the wand back. “I need an oath from you.”

Totally defeated, Cammie placed the wand against her heart. “What do you want me to swear?”

Thomas told her, and after she'd finished, he helped her take the pain potion before removing the portkey spell from the pillow. “I will let you return home later; I want to talk to you before leave. But right now I think you should get some sleep.”

Tormented by anguish and guilt over what she'd done, Cammie didn't believe she'd sleep as Thomas left the room. However moments later

her eyes closed, and she slipped into an exhausted and deep sleep. When she awoke, she headed into the bathroom; when she came out, Thomas was waiting for her. "Do you feel better?"

"Yes, thank you." Cammie's old lessons of manners around Dominus came back easily to her. "What happens now?"

"Now we eat, but not here." Thomas took her arm, and apparated them to his rooms. "We'll talk after dinner."

Believing she wouldn't be able to stomach anything, when she smelt the food, Cammie discovered that she was starving and ate everything that was placed in front of her. After finishing, she placed her napkin on the table, and boldly asked about the topic Thomas wanted to discuss. "So what are we going to talk about?"

"The Dark Arts." Thomas placed his own napkin down. "Did you enjoy the book?"

Cammie was confused by his question. "What book?"

"The book you've got in your bedroom on the Dark Arts." Thomas elaborated on his description. "The one everyone thinks is a charms book."

"How do you know about that?" Cammie asked in a horrified voice. "No-one knows about it."

"Obviously I do." Thomas told her, as he got to his feet.

"You've been in my room?" Cammie still didn't make the connection.

A connection that Thomas began to provide. "Cammie, why do you think I treated you so well during your time here? Giving you lessons; providing you with protection; training you; allowing you to remove your ring at Christmas?"

"I'm not sleeping with you." Cammie's voice was full of disgust and terror.

"I'm already married, Cammie, and have no interest in any woman except for my wife." Thomas disabused Cammie of her notion.

Cammie was relieved by his response. "So why did you do it?"

"I'm surprised you haven't guessed yet." Thomas couldn't resist using a reference from one of Cammie's favorite movies, as she had with him when she'd compared him to the Emperor. "As Darth Vader said to Luke Skywalker, 'search your feelings'."

Unlike the movies, Cammie knew that the man in front of her wasn't her father, and her blood ran cold as she finally came to the only logical conclusion she could, the book being the deciding factor. Her voice quivering, she uttered a name. "Uncle Thomas?"

Thomas removed his mask. "I knew you'd get there in the end."

"I trusted you." Cammie stumbled to her feet, wanting to put as much room as possible between her and Thomas. "Why?"

"For many reasons; the main one at the moment being that you're bait, Cammie." Thomas watched the dismay that crept across his niece's features.

"Dad." Cammie whispered in fear.

Thomas shook his head. "It isn't H.J. who's going to be your knight-in-shining-armor." Thomas walked back to his seat and picked up his glass of wine, looking at Cammie over it. "Do you remember when I told you what would happen if you ever told anyone your true identity?"

Cammie did, only too well. "Please, Uncle Thomas, not Harry."

"Potter should be here within the next few hours." Thomas confirmed Cammie's correct guess. "And as I warned you, he's going to pay for your indiscretion, as well as his actions."

"Please don't kill him." Cammie pleaded. "I'll do anything you ask; just don't kill Harry."

Not one to go back on his promises, Thomas had intended to do that exactly that, but seeing the desperation on his niece's face, he came up with another idea that was going to punish Harry far more than if he simply killed him. "If you want him to live, then you're going to do exactly as I tell you to do once Harry arrives. If you deviate from what I'm going to tell you, or intervene, then I'll kill him, but I won't do it quickly. I'll make sure he feels every last ounce of pain I can inflict on him before he dies, and I'll make you watch while I do it. Do I make myself my clear?"

"Yes." Cammie's voice shook with fear.

"And from now on, you'll address me as 'my Master or Dominus' in public, and 'Uncle Thomas' at all other times unless others are present." Thomas instructed her. He rose once more to his feet, and walked over to a small table on the far side of the room. "By the way, this is for you."

Cammie just stared at the red mask in her Uncle's hand, and didn't attempt to take it as he walked over to her. "That's an apprentice's mask."

"That's because you're going to become my apprentice, Cammie." Thomas pushed the mask into her hands. "It's my main reason for wanting you on my side."

Forced to take the mask, Cammie stared in disbelief at her Uncle. "But as I told you on the Island, I'm not powerful enough. Wouldn't you rather have someone like Uncle Harry?"

Thomas shook his head. "There is no-one else like Harry. He's in a class of his own, just as I am. And even though H.J. and Potter are essentially the same person, even they don't come close to him."

Thomas' answer still didn't resolve Cammie's unspoken question as to why he'd chosen her. "So why choose me?"

“Because as I told you on the Island, you are more powerful than you think. The ability to perform of some of the darker spells that you have been doing isn’t necessarily within everyone. You’ve shown the same aptitude for them that the Sirius Black I knew once did.” Thomas began, only for Cammie’s look of disgust to stop him.

“I’m nothing like him.” Cammie couldn’t believe that he’d equate her with a killer.

“You’re more like him than anyone else I know.” Thomas began to tell her why he believed that. “Even though I introduced you initially to the Dark Arts, you only took it back up to try and help your family and friends, just as Sirius did. And you both lied to your families and friends to do it. And as he did, you will one day take your rightful place to stand beside me.”

Cammie knew only too well from what she’d been told what that meant. “I will never be your executioner.”

“You’d be surprised.” Thomas wasn’t put off by her reticence. “When I said to you that you needed to embrace the Dark Arts to eliminate the problem of your eyes changing, what I didn’t mention is that it will consume you, just as it consumed Sirius. You’ll find yourself capable of more than you’d possibly imagine could be possible.”

“No.” Cammie shook her head. “I might have agreed to serve you and I don’t have a lot choice in the matter, but I’ll never allow myself to become that perverted.”

“But you will.” Thomas knew only too well the effects of the Dark Arts on a person. “You see, just like Sirius did, you’ll do exactly what I tell you to. And if you refuse to do as I ask, for the moment I’ll punish Harry in your stead. Eventually though, even you will have to shoulder your own burdens.”

Cammie sneered at her Uncle. “So much for telling me that you’d never hurt me.”

“And I won’t.” Thomas didn’t believe in lying, so instead he let Cammie’s belief that he’d actually hurt her work for him. “I’ve plenty of other people to do it for me.”

It was only now that Cammie realized the predicament she was in, and what Thomas had already worked out. “And you’re not going to let me go home, are you?”

“If you want to return, then you can.” Thomas denied her accusation. “But you’ll go through withdrawal if you do.”

Cammie paled. “I don’t have a lot of choice do I?”

“Not really.” Thomas sat back down at the table.

Cammie turned over the mask that she found so abhorrent. “Uncle Harry warned me that I’d sell my soul if I practiced the Dark Arts. I didn’t believe him.”

“As Harry has been in your shoes before, albeit apprenticed to Sirius and not myself, you should have listened to him.” Thomas pointed towards the seat she’d just vacated. “Now sit down. We’re going to discuss what’s going to happen once Harry arrives.”

On the stroke of seven, Harry Potter portkeyed into a room he recognized as Cammie’s former living quarters. He spotted a plain white mask on the table, together with a note. ‘Put it on. You know where to find me.’

In Thomas’ rooms, Cammie clutched convulsively at the tablecloth as a knock sounded at the door. Thomas beckoned to her. “Come here.” Cammie had little choice but to get up and walk over to Thomas.

Thomas immediately put his hand on her shoulder, maneuvering her in front of him, before pulling out his wand, and causing the door to fly open. “Come in.”

Cammie could feel her heart racing as a white-masked individual walked into the room, and asked her a question. "Mie, are you alright?"

"Yes." Cammie bit out, even as she wanted to scream 'run' but knowing she would sign Harry's death warrant if she did.

"Shut the door, take off your mask, and then come and kneel in front of us." Thomas instructed. "We have some unfinished business."

The young man did as he was told, but still made a demand of Thomas. "Let Mie go, Dominus. You've gotten what you want."

"I will be returning Cammie to her parents later if you co-operate." Thomas promised. "But first you're going to broaden the oath you swore to me on that first occasion, Harry. This time you're going to swear to serve me to the death; to protect me with your life if necessary; never to raise arms against me; to keep my secrets, and to obey me in all things." Thomas kept his wand at Cammie's throat. "If you don't do it, then she'll die."

Again Cammie wanted to cry out but with Thomas' threat still ringing in her ears, she didn't. Instead she stood there impassively as Harry pulled out his wand, and swore the oath, panting with pain afterwards. "Now let Mie go."

"Not just yet." Thomas turned, and aimed his wand at a set of double doors, which flew open. "You see, Harry, I've decided that I'm going to allow you to come back into the fold, and I know exactly who you're going to replace."

A bloody and battered Lily was dragged into the room by two masked members of the Inner Circle, before they dumped her on the floor and left. Harry stared in amazement at Thomas. "You want me to replace her?"

"Once you've killed her, Harry." Thomas informed him. "After everything I did for her, she's failed me. She failed you too, Harry."

She stood by and was going to let me kill you on Azkaban Island. Don't you think she deserves it?"

He couldn't deny that she did. "Yes but..."

"I'll give you a choice, Harry." Thomas interrupted, jamming his wand more firmly into Cammie's neck. "You either kill her, or I kill Cammie. I'll give you ten seconds to decide."

"Don't hurt her." The young man called out. "I'll do it." He met Cammie's eyes. "I'm sorry, Mie, but I have to do this. Close your eyes." As Cammie did just that, he focused on how much he hated Dominus, and turned his wand on the red-haired woman. "Avada Kedavra."

As the green light died away, the sound of clapping reached his ears and he span around. "What the fuck?"

"You don't really think Dominus would have me executed after going to so much trouble to rescue me, do you, Harry? That was just a worthless Muggle I chose at random." Lily had picked her up off the street. "But it warms my heart to know that you can be ruthless when you need to be."

"I only did it to save Mie." He protested.

"But you enjoyed the feeling, didn't you, Harry?" Lily walked over to him, and put a hand under his chin. "It makes you feel alive, doesn't it?"

Cammie noticed as Lily lifted Harry's head that his eyes were black, as he asked a question. "Why the charade? Why not just kill me?"

"Because I agreed to spare your life." Thomas placed a hand on Lily's shoulder as she came to stand beside him. "I have to admit, I didn't think you had it in you to take a life, but you've been able to prove me wrong."

“By letting me believe I’d killed her?” Black eyes met green as Lily smiled warmly at her son.

“How else?” Thomas then moved onto a subject that had been troubling him ever since Harry had managed to escape what should have been a certain death. “And now we’ve established your capabilities, I want to know how you managed to evade death through your Dark Mark.”

“I don’t know how.” Harry responded.

Thomas sighed. “Don’t make me threaten her again, Harry.”

“I swear on the House of Potter that I don’t know.” The young man called out quickly. “I just presumed it was something to do with the wards at BritAD.”

Thomas knew that if he’d been lying, Harry would have doomed any future children he might have to becoming squibs and dying before reaching maturity. He made a note to check with his contact to see if the Ministry had developed such a ward, before returning his attention back to Harry. “I believe you. Now kneel again, and roll up your sleeve.”

Cammie’s stomach lurched over as she discerned what Thomas was about to do. As Harry rolled up his sleeve, the Dark Mark he’d previously received stood out vividly against the white skin. “You’re going to give me the Dark Mark again, aren’t you?”

“I like to think of it as a precautionary measure.” Thomas placed his wand against the Dark Mark he’d once inflicted. “Morsmordre.”

Cammie fought not to cry as she watched her boyfriend struggle not to make a sound, closing her eyes as he eventually cried out as the pain became overwhelming.

Thomas lifted his wand as he ended the curse. “You’ve surprised me, Harry. The last time I did that, you weren’t quite so stalwart about it.”

“People change.” The newly renewed Dark Mark was now red and livid as the young man rolled down his sleeve.

Thomas withdrew a vial from his pocket. “Now I need you to take this, Harry.”

“What is it?” He knew it wasn’t pain relief, even though he wished it was.

“Emotional suppressant. The dose you have there will last at least six months.” Thomas informed him.

“Why is it necessary to take this?” Harry rose unsteadily to his feet and took the vial but didn’t drink it, unwilling even now to take it unless he had to.

“Just take it, Harry.” Thomas ordered, and Cammie watched with dismay as Harry downed the contents. “In answer to your question, the suppressant will only allow Lupin and Sebastian to detect low level feelings from you but nothing more. I can’t permit them to be able to determine how you feel about Cammie.”

Cammie could see that Thomas’ declaration had confused Harry. “Why exactly am I supposed to be hiding how I feel about her?”

Thomas released Cammie. “My dear, if you wouldn’t mind.”

On quaking legs, Cammie walked into the room that Lily had just vacated, before returning with a red mask in her hand. “This is mine, Harry.” She slipped it on. “I’m Dominus’ new apprentice.”

Thomas wasn’t surprised when Harry refused to believe she’d done it willingly. “You’ve got her under the Imperius. It’s the only way she’d agree to this.”

Thomas gave Harry an instruction. “End the spell if I’ve done that. I won’t stop you.”

He watched as Harry aimed his wand at Cammie. “Finite.”

Thomas then asked Cammie a question. "Did you take up service willingly?"

"Yes." Cammie responded, before revealing her secret to her boyfriend. "I've been meeting with Dominus for months now, Harry."

"You're lying." Even though it was what Harry Sebastian had suspected, the young man couldn't allow himself to believe what Cammie was saying. "If he's threatening to kill me, Mie, then let him but don't give your soul to him."

"You're too late, Harry." Cammie sighed dramatically. "Watch." She aimed her wand in the air, and the spell she'd found surprisingly easy to master while they'd waited for Harry's arrival, left her lips. "Morsmordre."

Anger and dismay crossed the young man's face as the skull and snake hovered in the air. "I can show you a few more if you'd like." Cammie demonstrated several more advanced Dark Arts spells, before turning back to Harry. "Are you getting the picture now, Harry?"

"I thought you were in danger when I walked in here. I didn't want to believe Harry's warning to me that you might have changed sides." Harry was devastated, and it showed in his demeanor as he sank in shock to his knees, and looked up in dismay at Cammie. "You're quite an accomplished actress to have pulled the wool over everyone's eyes as you did."

Cammie begged to differ, but instead acted as if his words had been a compliment. "Thank you, Harry."

Thomas smiled behind his mask. "Now we've got that out of the way, there's one more thing to deal with. Harry, while I'm willing to accept you back, there's still the little matter of your treachery to be taken into consideration."

Lily knelt down beside her son, and took his face in her hands so she could look into his eyes. "I told you not to get involved with Camille, didn't I, but you refused to listen. Now you have to pay the price, Harry." Lily let go and rose to her feet, bending her head as Thomas touched his wand to her neck, ignoring her son's gasp as he grabbed his arm as the Dark Mark pulsated, indicating that a meeting had been called.

After lowering his wand, Thomas held out his hand to Cammie, who dutifully took it. Lily walked ahead and opened the door for the pair. "I'll see you later, Harry."

In his distress, Harry found himself unable to answer as Thomas stopped in front of him. "We're going downstairs now where I'm going to introduce Cammie as my new apprentice. Afterwards, you're going to be joining us..." Thomas hesitated momentarily before continuing. "...as tonight's entertainment." Harry's world then went black.

Next Chapter: We discover why Cammie agreed to return home; Harry turns on Cammie.

Chapter 60: Traitor

7 November 2006

Potter Place, Grimmauld Square

Harry heard the moan in the hallway and rushed out. "Harry, Cammie."

"Harry's badly hurt, Uncle Harry. Please help him." Even though she knew she faced withdrawal by returning with her boyfriend, by the time Thomas and his men had finished with him, she'd been unable to leave him to return alone; she'd needed to know that he'd be alright.

"Baby." Hermione wrapped Cammie in her arms.

"Mum, I'm so sorry." Cammie was relieved to see her mother, and started to cry uncontrollably. "I'm so sorry."

Harry Potter dropped the invisibility cloak he'd been wearing. "No, she's not."

Cammie gasped as she pulled free of her mother's embrace. "Harry!" She looked down at the man on the floor. "If you're here, then who's that?"

"Your father." Harry Potter snarled.

"No." Cammie shook her head from side to side in pure horror. "It can't be."

Hermione had also been filled with dismay when Harry Potter had revealed the true identity of the man lying on the floor. "That's H.J.? I thought he was covering the night shift."

Sirius shifted guiltily. "He's polyjuiced to look like Harry. He told us to tell you a lie because he didn't want you worrying."

Severus looked faintly pleased as he checked the time, and addressed his stepson. "Six hours. So it worked well."

His face grim, his stepson nodded. "Like a charm."

Sirius had heard his godson's comment about Cammie not being sorry, and he wondered what had gone on. "What happened, Harry?"

"I can't tell you." Harry Potter was still bound by his original oath to Thomas, and couldn't pass on what had happened in the room.

Now standing alone, Cammie cried even harder, guilt and despair eating away at her. She became aware of a noise at the fireplace, and turned to see Craig Delaney, who'd been summoned by her Uncle Harry, stepping out of it, wiping sleep out of his eyes. "Stand back. I'll treat him where he is for the moment."

Harry Sebastian questioned his niece. "Are you hurt?"

Cammie shook her head, as she carried on crying. "Just Dad."

"What happened?" He asked.

"I can't tell you." Cammie sobbed.

Harry swore. "Dammit. Another bloody oath."

Sirius meanwhile was kneeling down by Hermione and Craig. "What's the verdict?"

Craig answered as he treated H.J. "Six broken ribs; a broken leg; numerous lacerations from knife wounds; burns, and I can't even begin to count how many lash marks there are on his chest, back and legs. Plus major spell damage as well."

Cammie wanted to shut out what Craig was saying, as she watched helplessly while Craig continued to heal her father. "It's all my fault."

Harry Potter gave her a vicious look. "I'm not arguing with you."

Sirius knew that Cammie had to have done something terrible for his godson to attack her yet again. "Can she be trusted?"

Harry scowled. "What do you think?"

"I'll take that as a no." Sirius turned to Cammie. "I need your wands."

"No." Even though she knew it was bound to happen, Cammie still felt panicked, and refused pointblank. "I'll go into withdrawal, and I'm not going through that a third time."

Her boyfriend, or as he now considered himself, former boyfriend, pointed at the man on the floor. "He went through much worse for you, and you can't even do this for him?" He laughed bitterly. "That was a bloody stupid question under the circumstances, wasn't it Camille?"

Harry Sebastian and Sirius shared a look at the way Harry addressed his former girlfriend, with Sirius holding out his hand. "Wands, Cammie."

Cammie shot Harry Potter a look that spoke volumes. "You're right. I should be able to do this if Dad went through that for me." She then passed over the wands without any further comment, and reached out to touch Harry's arm.

He pulled back. "Don't ever touch me again, Camille."

Harry Sebastian just knew in that moment what must have happened, as he felt disgust, anger, hurt and betrayal roll off the young man. "It's as I suspected. She's gone over to him, Sirius." He turned on his niece. "Didn't you?"

Cammie couldn't look at Harry. "I can't tell you anything, Uncle Harry, but I am sorry."

Unable to feel any remorse coming off her, Harry didn't believe his niece. "I'll take her to a holding cell, and arrange for a potion to be administered while she goes through withdrawal again."

Hermione looked up from where she was holding H.J.'s hand. "You can't really believe that Cammie would betray us. She's just a child."

"Until I speak to H.J., I don't know what to believe, Hermione. But given the evidence, I'm not willing to risk anyone's life by not taking precautions." Harry grabbed hold of Cammie's shoulder. "Keep still, Cammie."

Afraid of what was going to happen to her but having little choice, Cammie did as her Uncle demanded, and she vanished with him.

Hermione looked up at Harry Potter. "Now will someone tell me how my husband ended up like this?"

Almost Six Hours Earlier

A house-elf appeared next to Harry Potter. "Letter, Master Potter."

Harry went to grab it, only for both H.J. and his brother to scream out. "Don't touch it."

The house-elf jumped nervously. H.J. pointed towards the table. "Put it on there."

Harry Potter addressed the quivering house-elf. "Do it."

Harry Sebastian pulled out his wand, and after casting spell after spell, relaxed. "It's clean except for the portkey inside." He then carefully withdrew the letter, and opened it before handing it to Harry Potter. "It's from him."

Harry read the letter out aloud.

'Potter

If you want to see your girlfriend alive again, then use the enclosed portkey. It is timed to depart at 7pm. If it activates and you do not show up, then this time there will be no reprieve for her.

D'

The young man was pale by the time he'd finished reading. "It's exactly the same thing he did with you, isn't it?"

Harry nodded. "Except that time he was after something specific. This time I don't know what he wants."

The Potter heir did. "He wants me. I took Mie from under his nose, and he's going to kill me for it."

Sirius knew what Harry was about to suggest. "Harry, you can't go."

"I have to, Uncle Sirius." Harry knew he had little choice in the matter. "As stupid as she's been in going to him for help, Mie will die if I don't."

"I'll go." H.J. offered. "She's my daughter."

Harry knew what would happen to his brother if he went. "H.J., you know very well that he'll kill you and Cammie if we don't follow that letter to the tee. That was why I went last time when he took Cammie and Cass, and not Sirius."

H.J. fell silent for a few minutes as he thought quickly. "How long have we got?"

Sirius checked the time. "About an hour and forty minutes."

"I've got an idea." H.J. vanished.

Harry Potter turned to his godfather and Harry. "What's he doing?"

Both of them shook their heads, Harry speaking up. "I have no idea."

Ten minutes later H.J. returned with Severus. He addressed his brother. "Harry, you're going to need your invisibility cloak for what I've got planned."

"I'll fetch it." Cassandra vanished without questioning H.J.'s intentions.

H.J. turned to his brother. "Severus has managed to come close to perfecting the longer lasting polyjuice potion. He hasn't had time to try it out but he reckons it will last at least six, maybe seven hours."

"You're going in as masquerading as my godson, aren't you?" Sirius guessed.

H.J. nodded. "But I need Harry and his remnant of the Dark Mark to get me through any wards. Harry can then make his way under his invisibility cloak to the entrance of Castrum House and get out."

Harry Potter stepped in. "I'm going, not you."

H.J. turned down his demand. "Cammie is my daughter, and I'm doing this."

Sirius pointed something important out. "What about your limp, H.J.?"

"I'm going to use a field dressing to mask it." H.J. knew that if he survived long enough, he'd be in agony for his troubles but he didn't care.

As difficult as decisions like this were, Sirius couldn't help but feel relieved that his godson wouldn't have to return to Castrum House. "I understand why you're doing this, H.J. but what about Hermione? She's out with Tonks and doesn't know."

H.J. wasn't going to let them tell her either. "Tell her I'm in work."

Harry Potter tried again. "H.J., I'm going to do it. You have a wife and son to think about."

“Hermione and Sevvie are perfectly safe; my daughter isn’t.” H.J. responded as he held out his hand. “I want one of your hairs, Harry.”

The young man looked into the implacable face of his girlfriend’s father, and, aware that H.J. wasn’t going to back down, he plucked out one of his hairs. “You can have this but I’ll get you through the wards, not Harry.”

Harry Sebastian shook his head. “I’m a far better dueler than you, Harry. If something goes wrong...”

Harry Potter interrupted him. “If something goes wrong and we both end up dead, then you’re the only person that stands a chance of killing Dominus. We need you alive, Harry.”

Sirius, while afraid for his godson, had to admit that he’d made a good point. “Harry, my godson has made a valid argument.” He turned to the young man. “Harry, be careful.”

“I will.” Harry hugged his godfather.

Just before seven o’clock, after casting numerous spells to hide him from detection, as an extra precaution Harry Potter also pulled the invisibility cloak over him that Cassandra had fetched, and reached out and grabbed H.J.

H.J. was aware that Harry was nervous as his shaking was being transmitted through his touch. “I know you’re scared, Harry.”

“You must be too.” Harry responded. “But you’re not shaking.”

“I am.” H.J. admitted. “But you’re shaking so hard you can’t feel it.”

Harry Sebastian interrupted the two men. “Quiet. The portkey should go off in less than a minute.” He then addressed the invisible Harry. “Harry, don’t do anything stupid. Just get H.J. in and get out.” Finally he spoke to his brother. “H.J. if there’s a way out, take it. I don’t care what you have to do, just do it. Anything you have to do will be noted as being in the line of duty.”

“Understood.” H.J. hoped he wouldn't have to kill anyone to get out, but Harry's words had made it permissible for him to do so without fear of retribution. “Take care of Hermione and Sevvv for me if I don't make it back.”

The words had barely left H.J.'s mouth when the two men vanished.

10th November 2006

H.J. opened his eyes to find Hermione sitting next to him. “I feel like shit.”

“You look like it.” Hermione ran a hand over his face. “I was afraid you'd die.”

H.J. shook his head. “He didn't want Harry dead; just to suffer.”

Hermione gave a shiver as she remembered the bloody state her husband had been in. “H.J. what happened to you? Harry Potter couldn't tell us anything.”

“I think you should get Sirius and Harry. They need to hear this.” H.J. had a message to deliver.

When Hermione returned, not only were Sirius and Harry with her, but all three Potters, Cassandra, and Severus were too. “Where's everyone else?”

Sirius explained. “We've got Cammie in a holding cell, H.J. as we believe she's betrayed us. And under the circumstances, we're not telling anyone else who wasn't there that night, except for James and Tonks as this is their house.”

H.J. understood why Sirius had said it. “You still don't trust Thomas, do you?”

“I do, but we all trusted your daughter as well, and look at where that got you.” Sirius smiled encouragingly at H.J. “H.J. I know it's tough

but right now we need to know what happened from your point of view.”

Hermione took H.J.’s hand. “Take your time, H.J.”

H.J. let his mind wander back. “The portkey transported Harry and myself into a set of rooms that Harry said had once belonged to Cammie. There was a mask on the table which I put on, and after showing me where to go, Harry left.” H.J. coughed. “Can I have some water?”

Severus reached over and grabbed the glass, helping him drink it. “Slowly.”

H.J. smiled despite himself. “I never pegged you for the Florence Nightingale type, Severus.”

“Just shut up and get on with it.” Severus snapped, feeling embarrassed.

Harry Potter broke into the conversation before H.J. could continue. “Actually I didn’t leave. I slipped into Dominus’ rooms right behind you.”

H.J. scowled at the young man. “You bloody idiot.”

“I was hoping I might get a chance to get you out.” Harry explained the reasoning behind his change of actions. “But I didn’t.”

“Thank you.” H.J. was aware of how brave Harry had been. “I can’t exactly tell you everything that went on but this should say it all.” H.J. lifted his left arm.

Harry had felt completely impotent at having to simply stand and watch H.J. take the Dark Mark in his place. “I’m sorry. I wanted to do something but I couldn’t.”

“I know you can’t attack him, Harry and you’d have ended up dead if you’d tried to interfere. And besides, it was my decision to go in

there.” H.J. reminded him. “You know very well that the only reason I let you go with me was because of your Dark Mark, and because I thought you were going to leave.”

“Speaking of the Dark Mark, we’ve already removed the link that would enable Dominus to kill you.” Sirius informed him. “Just in case.”

“That’s nice to know.” H.J. sighed as he rubbed his arm. “I thought this was bad but what came next was worse.” He caught the sympathetic look from Harry Potter. “I don’t know how you managed to stay still, and not say anything.”

“I’d have ended up dead if I’d tried, and given the choices at the time, I wasn’t willing to risk my life for her.” Harry responded.

Only H.J. knew that Harry Potter was talking about Lily Evans. “I can’t tell you what I did, but I hope that Harry will forgive me.”

Harry Potter shared a look with his godfather, before addressing the stricken man. “H.J., you had no choice. You know what would have happened, if you hadn’t.”

Harry guessed what had happened to his brother from Harry Potter’s comment. “Judging from what Harry’s just said, you had to kill someone, didn’t you?”

Harry couldn’t work out why H.J. had hoped for Harry’s forgiveness, until Severus jumped to the logical conclusion. “Did you have to kill Lily?”

“She’s alive and kicking.” H.J. was hindered by his oath from saying anything more.

“Then it was a first kill that Harry was supposed to make.” Harry deduced.

Catching the look of pity Harry Potter gave to H.J., Harry’s guess was confirmed, and Sirius sighed. “As Harry promised before you left, I won’t be filing charges against you, H.J. I’ll list it as an unknown

death in the line of duty, and add it to the list we already have against Dominus."

Severus had a good question. "So if you can't really tell us anything, then why did you want Sirius and Harry here?"

"Because I can tell you that Dominus had a message for Harry and Sirius." Thomas had hissed into his ear what he expected from him before he'd mercifully been allowed to pass out. He glanced at his brother. "He said to tell you and Sirius to prepare yourselves for what is to come. And that while once there were three, now there is truly only one."

Harry Sebastian sighed. "And he's right. Now both you and Harry are unable to attack him. Obviously he thinks it's because you're permanently incapacitated, and not because you've sworn an oath to him. But Dominus isn't my main concern right now, nor is the message about preparing ourselves."

Sirius agreed with Harry. "Harry's correct. Our main problem at the moment is that we need to decide what to do about Cammie. Even though neither of you can tell us outright, we believe she's betrayed us somehow."

It was this lack of being able to tell them what had happened that led Harry Sebastian to believe Thomas had changed his method of swearing oaths. "I'm guessing that Dominus has dropped the part from the oaths where you can discuss what's happened with others who know the truth. He's obviously learnt his lesson."

Harry Potter knew that he could discuss what had happened with H.J. and Cammie as they'd both been there, but he couldn't extend his confidence to anyone else, even if they were a hundred percent sure that they knew the truth. So he couldn't confirm Harry's hypothesis, even though it was true. "Whether he has or hasn't, I can't tell you. What are you going to do about Camille?"

Harry was at his wits end as to what to do with his niece. "I've tried Legilimency on her, and I can't get past the oath she's obviously

sworn. Veritaserum is also out for the same reasons. But most alarmingly, the gaps in her memories go back for months.”

Even though he knew he’d have visited prison on anyone else for betraying them, like any parent, H.J. was worried about his daughter. “You won’t put her in New Azkaban, will you? She’s only sixteen, Sirius.”

“Did she play any part in your torture?” Sirius asked.

“You know that neither Harry nor I can answer that directly.” H.J. responded. “But do you really think Cammie would do something like that?”

Harry could feel no animosity coming from Harry Potter at the statement, so he assumed the truth from both H.J.’s answer, and Harry’s feelings. “I’ll take that as a no.” He then realized that throughout the whole conversation, he hadn’t been able to detect any significant reaction from his brother, apart from facial reactions. “What the hell did he do to you, H.J.? I can’t feel any strong emotions at all coming from you.”

“Sorry, Harry.” H.J. looked at his brother apologetically. “I can’t tell you that either.”

Severus hazarded a guess at what H.J. had been given. “Emotional suppressant. It would block any strong feelings while still letting a vague sense of emotion come through. But why give him that?”

Cassandra figured it out. “Cammie came back with the person she thought was her boyfriend, and if what we suspect is true about her betraying us, Harry would have been pissed at her for that and for what he’d had to go through. The suppressant would stop my Harry from sensing anything was out of the ordinary. Dominus obviously didn’t count on H.J. taking Harry Potter’s place and Harry still bearing witness to what happened.”

“I’m almost willing to bet that Cammie has taken the same suppressant.” Harry finally understood why he hadn’t been able to

detect much emotion from his niece; he'd simply put it down to shock at being caught out. "She wouldn't want to reveal her true feelings either." He turned to Severus. "Do you have an antidote to it?"

Severus shook his head. "It has to wear off naturally but I can detect if it's in someone's bloodstream."

"Then we need to test H.J. and Cammie." Sirius decided. "But we still also need to decide what we're going to do with Cammie. We can't prove she's betrayed us as neither H.J. nor Harry can directly say that she has, and we can't prove she's committed a crime, so without hard evidence I can't keep her locked up forever. But I also know we can't let her run free."

"You could ward her in a room here." James suggested.

Sirius mulled over the offer. "I think James' idea is a good one. We've checked and Cammie doesn't have a Dark Mark, so Dominus won't be able to summon her that way, and with the Fidelius in place he can't get in to break her out as he did with Lily."

Cassandra pointed something out. "What about her ring, Dad? We know she's wearing one and from what the Custodian of Azkaban told us, Dominus has used one before as a Dark Mark."

"We've ran every test on it we can think of, Cassie, and I can't prove it's a protean charm, just as I couldn't prove the ring that the Custodian had with him was one either." Sirius countered. "We don't have a lot of choice, so we're going to have to take the chance, and lock her up here until we can figure out what to do with her. We'll erect wards keyed specifically to Cammie to stop her from apparating and portkeying."

"And what about when people such as Thomas or Mione come here expecting to see her?" Hermione asked. "If we're keeping this amongst ourselves, we can't tell anyone."

“I’ll morph into her.” Tonks suggested. “I know it’s not a good long term solution but until we find one or discover what really happened, it will have to suffice.”

“Let’s do it then.” Sirius decided.

The Next Day

Cammie awoke to see someone she now presumed was her former boyfriend, sitting in a chair, reading a book. “You’re the guard?”

“Yes.” Harry turned to her, his wand in his hand in case he needed to defend himself.

Cammie’s eyes fell on the wand. “You really don’t trust me, do you?”

“I have no idea of what you’re capable of.” Harry responded. “And I’m not willing to risk my life for a traitorous bitch like you.”

Cammie wanted to tell Harry that she hadn’t betrayed him but couldn’t. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t even bother. Your apologies are wasted on me, Camille.” Harry couldn’t bring himself to call her ‘Mie’ anymore. “I was there in case you’ve forgotten. I had to listen while you told the person you thought was me that you’d been deceiving them for months.”

Cammie could hear the hurt in Harry’s voice. “I…”

Harry held up his hand, not wanting to listen to her excuses. “I think I could have dealt with that but what you did to your father was beyond reproach.” Harry let his feelings show in his voice.

“You know I didn’t have any choice.” Cammie protested.

Harry disagreed. “You’re his precious fucking apprentice, Camille. The worst he would have done to you was to put you under the Cruciatus.” He ran a hand over his face as he struggled to control his temper. “Why, Camille? I thought you’d say no when Dominus asked

if he should administer another twenty lashes, but heartless fucking bitch that you are, you didn't. Did you get a kick out of watching the man you thought was me being whipped until he couldn't scream anymore?"

Cammie felt as if she'd been slapped in the face. "Harry, you must know I didn't."

Despite the earnest, pleading look on Cammie's face, Harry didn't believe her. "If I didn't know what a consummate liar you are, I'd almost believe you. And speaking of lying, I now find myself until able to believe anything you've ever told me."

"I've never lied to you except about practising the Dark Arts." Cammie defended herself.

"How do I know that?" Harry went on, wanting to hit out at his former girlfriend in his hurt. "For all I know you could have been lying to me ever since I ran into you at Castrum House. And as your Dad pointed out, you're quite the actress, Camille." Harry thought back over the times they'd spent together, and the one memory that had meant the most to him. "When I think about how you gave me that spiel about how you wanted to wait for marriage to have sex, it was obviously a lie. Tell me, Camille, were you even a virgin as you claimed when we first fucked?"

Cammie was heartbroken at Harry's denigration of a memory she had thought was special and precious to them both. "I'd never made love before, and you know it."

Harry leant forward, despair driving him on. "But I don't, Camille. For all I know you've been fucking Dominus ever since you were first taken."

A look of absolute disgust crossed Cammie's face. "I would never sleep with him."

"Forgive me if I don't believe you." Harry flung the words at her. "Especially as he was so eager to announce you as his apprentice. 'Carus' means beloved, doesn't it?"

“Yes.” Cammie couldn’t deny the Latin translation. “But that means nothing.”

“A little like your words.” Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out a box. “And to think I was going to ask you to marry me. The pair of you must have had a good time laughing at me behind my back.”

“We didn’t.” Cammie denied Harry’s accusation, as she looked miserably at the small black velvet box in Harry’s hand.

Harry sneered at her. “I don’t believe one word that is coming out of your lying, treacherous mouth, Camille.”

“You really hate me, don’t you?” Cammie couldn’t help but ask.

Harry laughed bitterly in disbelief that she’d even asked. “Because of you, H.J. had to take a life, swear allegiance to that bastard, and was publicly tortured.”

“I didn’t know it was Dad.” Cammie cried out.

“I’m well aware of that fact, Camille.” Harry got to his feet. “You thought it was me.” He ran a hand through his hair and laughed again. “Do you want to hear something funny?” He continued when Cammie didn’t respond. “If you had truly been held against your will then I would have happily endured all that for you myself, Camille, but it was all a fucking charade.”

Cammie by now had tears streaming down her face. “Harry...”

Harry prevented her from saying anything by answering her question. “You wanted to know if I hate you, didn’t you?” When Cammie didn’t respond, Harry shouted at her. “Fucking answer the question, Camille.”

Cammie simply nodded her head, already knowing the answer. Harry stared into her eyes, wanting to make sure that she was aware of exactly how much he hated her. “The answer is yes, Camille, I hate

you.” He hesitated. “Actually, no I don’t. Hate isn’t even strong enough a word for what I truly feel about you. But let me try and put my feelings into context. If I was faced with the same choice as your father was, of choosing whether to save an anonymous Muggle or you, I’d choose the Muggle. I’d prefer to see you rot in hell.”

It was too much for Cammie, and she burst into fully-fledged tears. Harry couldn’t deal with it, and apparated out. “She’s awake. Someone else can take over baby-sitting her.”

After handing over his guard duty, Harry vanished to his bedroom, throwing himself onto the bed. He glanced at the box in his hand that contained the ring he’d intended to give to Cammie at Christmas, once he’d spoken to H.J. Opening it, Harry stared numbly at the heart shaped sapphire that was surrounded by diamonds, before closing his eyes to try and stop the tears that had begun to fall.

2nd December 2006

Thomas hugged ‘Cammie’, surprised when she returned his hug quite as fervently as she did, especially given what he’d recently done to her boyfriend. “Anyone would think I hadn’t seen you in a year.”

‘Cammie’ giggled. “I just missed you, that’s all.”

“And I missed you as well.” Thomas responded automatically as he took her hand. “In fact I want you and Harry to join me tomorrow on the Island.”

“I don’t know, Uncle Thomas.” Tonks, who was masquerading as Cammie, shook her head. “I think I’m still grounded for arguing with Dad.”

“H.J. said that you were only grounded for three weeks.” Thomas walked into the sitting room. “So I’m not taking no for answer.”

Tonks gently pulled her hand free. “I’d best ask Dad first.”

“Go on then.” Thomas’ smiling expression hid his true feelings. He then went in search of Harry Potter after Tonks ran off. “Harry, I was wondering if you’d like to spend a little time with me on the Island. You can portkey out later today if you want to.”

Deciding that it would do some good to put some distance between Cammie and himself, Harry found himself agreeing to Thomas’ offer. “I’d like that.”

Tonks came back into the room. “I can’t find Dad. I thought he was upstairs dueling with Ja... Uncle James.”

“Never mind.” Thomas had caught Tonks’ slip. “So tell me, how is your romance coming along?”

Harry plastered on a fake smile. “Great.”

“I was trying to talk Cammie into coming to the Island but she said that H.J. wouldn’t let her.” Thomas wanted to see how Harry would react.

“She’s right.” Harry frowned, as he hoped that the invitation was still extended to him. “Am I still invited?”

“Of course.” Thomas responded immediately. “I have a few things to sort out before we leave, so I’ll return later today.”

Several hours later, Thomas returned and spoke with James, who’d decided to take the weekend away from school. “So she’s still grounded?”

James nodded regretfully. “She refused to apologize, so H.J. added more time to her punishment.”

“A pity she can’t make it but I hope you don’t mind me stealing Harry away. With Mione in New York with Remus, I’m a little lonely.” Thomas wasn’t lying; he was missing his wife.

"Not at all." James had been worried about his son ever since he'd returned from Castrum House.

Thomas smiled happily at James. "In that case, while Harry fetches his bag, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to the bathroom."

In the bathroom, Thomas used his master ring to portkey to Cammie's side. As he'd suspected, only Cammie had been barred from the wards for portkeying and apparating.

When nothing had happened, and Cammie hadn't made any effort to escape, after the first week everyone had given up guarding Cammie by staying in the room. Knowing she couldn't leave, Cammie's only interaction with someone else was when they periodically checked in on her; even then they said nothing. Hearing someone apparate into the room, and thinking it was one of the others, Cammie span round. "I'm still...Uncle Thomas." She backed up, fear in her voice.

Thomas spoke hurriedly as he threw an invisibility cloak at her. "Put this on and hide behind that door. I'm going to cause a little mayhem."

Despite her fear, Cammie shook her head. "No. I'm already in enough trouble."

"You'll do as I tell you." Thomas snapped.

Again Cammie shook her head. "I'd rather disobey you and die."

"Would you prefer for Harry to die in your place? He's going to be joining me on the Island in a few minutes." Thomas informed her. "And I think it's time he learnt who I really am."

Cammie caved at Thomas' threat, and she pulled the invisibility cloak over her. "What do I have to do?"

"Walk out when the door is open, and make your way downstairs. I will shortly open the front door, and you'll walk out in front of me." Thomas instructed. "Close your eyes, and shield your face."

Cammie did as she was told, feeling rather than seeing the debris that flew around as an explosive spell hit the chest of drawers. Thomas had already vanished before the dust had settled. Cammie wasn't surprised when James, Tonks (who still looked like Cammie) and Harry all apparated into the room.

James ran into the bathroom. "Check the wardrobe."

Tonks came up empty. "She's not here."

Harry got up after checking under the bed, his wand outstretched. "And she's not here."

Before anyone could cast a detection spell, a knock sounded at the door, and a voice called out. "Is everything alright?"

James swore quietly. "Shit. Harry, go back downstairs. Nymy, change, and let me do the talking." He opened the door. "Sorry if we startled you."

"I heard what sounded like an explosion." Thomas faked concern. "What happened?"

James put his arm around Tonks. "Nymy tripped and accidentally fired off a Reducto spell."

"Isn't this Cammie's room?" Thomas moved forward, forcing James to step clear of the doorway. "Was she in here?"

"She's went back downstairs I believe to see Harry before he leaves." James responded. "We'd better get down and let them know what's happened."

"I'll clean up." Tonks offered.

Thomas followed James downstairs, knowing that Tonks had probably apparated down in front of them to resume her masquerade. Once he'd seen 'Cammie' he expressed his relief. "At least no-one was hurt. Harry, are you ready to go?"

Harry patted his pocket. "All set."

"We can walk to my house from here." Thomas made his way to the door and opened it wide. "After you."

Harry stepped outside, and, only wearing a light jacket, he shivered. "It's a little cold out today."

Thomas gave him a sympathetic look. "Let me just say goodbye to James and Cammie." He hugged his 'niece' and shook hands with James. "Tell Tonks I'll send her stepson home in a week or so."

The moment the door closed behind Thomas, he dipped his hand into his pocket. "Seeing as you're so cold, you may as well portkey directly to the Island. Make yourself comfortable. I just need to nip home and get a few things. Your room is the same one as you had when you stayed with us last time."

Harry took the pen, and having been there before, operated the portkey and vanished. Thomas walked away from the house. "Cammie, you had better be here."

"I am." A shaking voice responded.

"Take my arm." Thomas ordered, and then he vanished, taking Cammie with him.

Inside the house, James turned to his wife. "Do you think it was a good idea letting Harry go to the Island with Cammie missing?"

"He'll be a lot better off there, James." Tonks knew how much the situation had been eating at her stepson. "Right now I'm more concerned about what Uncle Sirius is going to say when he finds out that Cammie has somehow flown the coop."

"I wish I knew how she'd gotten out of here." James headed for the fireplace.

Ten minutes later, Harry Sebastian and Sirius were in the debris-strewn bedroom. Harry sniffed the air. "I can't smell anyone here aside from the usual people, and Thomas. What was he doing here?"

James explained about the explosion, and Thomas' offer to take Harry to the Island. "So apart from Thomas, you can't detect anyone else?"

Harry shook his head. "She did this on her own somehow."

"Then it's enough to confirm that she is indeed a traitor." Sirius decided. "I'm sorry, H.J., Hermione." Sirius had used H.J.'s ring to bring the couple home from the weekend break H.J. had taken his wife on to try and cheer her up.

Hermione burst into tears, having clung to the hope that everyone had been wrong about her daughter. H.J. sighed as he comforted his wife. He met Harry's eyes. "I'm in trouble now. Dominus is going to find out what I did now she's gone back to him."

"At least he can't kill you." Harry had never been happier that he had been able to remove that part of the Dark Mark. "But it's hardly a consolation given that we know we've lost Cammie to him."

The Island

Unaware that she was being discussed, Cammie found herself in the bedroom she usually used. "Why bring me here?"

"Because my children are here and Theresa is on vacation." Thomas responded. "For the moment I want to talk to you about how you were found out."

Cammie looked down at the floor, and didn't respond. Thomas let her know that this wasn't the end of it. "One way or another I will find out, Cammie. I'll be back shortly."

"Where are you going?" Cammie was now even more frightened than ever of her Uncle.

“To make sure Harry has settled in alright.” Thomas could see that Cammie was terrified at what he might do to Harry. “Do not leave this room.”

Harry smiled at Thomas as his host walked into the billiards room. “I hope you don’t mind that I decided to amuse myself.”

“Not at all.” Thomas could see that Harry had relaxed since arriving, which was in stark contrast to his uptight demeanor at Grimmauld Square. “I’m going to be tied up for a short time, so if you’ll excuse me.”

“I’m happy right here.” Harry assured him as he again picked up the cue that he’d put down on Thomas’ entrance.

After collecting his pensieve, Thomas headed back to Cammie’s room. “Now I want to know what has been going on.”

“I’d rather not say.” Cammie hoped in vain that Thomas wouldn’t press.

“And I’d rather know.” Thomas took out his wand. “I want to see what happened after you returned home.”

Cammie shook her head, not wanting to betray her Dad and Harry. “Please no.”

Thomas pulled out his wand as his niece shied away from him. He eventually backed her into the wall, where he gripped her chin. “I suggest you relax, otherwise, even though I don’t want to, I might end up hurting you.”

Cammie tried to think about anything but that evening and ended up failing, when thoughts of it dwelled at the front of her mind instead. She felt a slight pressure and Thomas was inside her mind. She gasped as she was released moments later, the coveted memory now being deposited into the pensieve that Thomas had brought in with him. “Please don’t watch that.”

Thomas ignored her entreaty and, grabbing her hand, pulled her into the pensieve with him. However, after watching the memory, instead of being angry, Thomas was amused, knowing that because of H.J.'s deception, he, like Harry Potter, would be unable to raise a wand against him. "So H.J. was the one who took the punishment for your boyfriend."

Cammie bit her lip. "I didn't know."

"There was no way you could." Thomas now had his answer as to how Cammie's supposed deceit had been discovered. "And it was Harry who gave you away. He was obviously in the room while you did your party piece." Thomas had frozen the memory, Harry Potter's face showing his contempt for Cammie. "He really doesn't like you anymore, does he?"

"No." Cammie responded tearfully. "He's only spoken to me once since it happened, and he made it perfectly clear that he hates me."

"Show me." Thomas ordered, wondering what had gone on between the two of them.

Cammie paled as she belatedly remembered Harry's comment about Thomas. "It's not much really. He just told me hated me before leaving."

"Judging from how white you've gone, I'd say that it was a little more than that, Cammie." Thomas hauled his niece out of the pensieve. "Give me the memory, Cammie, or I'll take it."

Aware that she couldn't resist Thomas, Cammie tearfully provided the memory, and was again dragged back into the pensieve. As he viewed the memory, Thomas' face tightened at Harry's crude comment about Cammie fucking him. "Stupid, stupid boy."

Seeing the look on Thomas' face, Cammie began to defend Harry. "I can see that you're mad, Uncle Thomas. But Harry was angry with me. He didn't know that you were Dominus when he said it."

Thomas said nothing else until he'd finished watching the remainder of the memory. "You do realize that I'm not going to simply let this slide, don't you?"

"Please don't hurt him." Cammie begged. "He's going to hate me even more if you do."

"You really do care about him, don't you?" Thomas could see how desperate his niece was.

"I love him." Cammie admitted.

"You've just listened to him say he'd rather you have died than a Muggle." Thomas pointed out to his niece. "And yet you're still defending him."

"I should have done something to help him when I thought it was Harry being tortured." Cammie responded in a quiet voice. "Even if it cost me my life."

"Are you saying that because you found out it was H.J. who'd come to rescue you?" Thomas inquired. "Or is it because you feel guilty for failing to defend him as Harry thought you should have?"

"Both." Cammie admitted as she bit her lip.

"You and your father would have both died, if you'd gone to his aid." Thomas told her. "While I wouldn't have hurt you, others would have stepped in. But I would have been the one to kill your father if you'd tried, just as I said I would."

"What are you going to do to Harry?" Cammie hoped that Thomas wouldn't visit the same harsh treatment on Harry as he had inflicted on her father.

"I haven't decided yet." Thomas rewound the part of the memory to where Harry had been most insulting, making Cammie listen again as

Harry ripped apart the memory of their first time together. "But he's going to pay for his insults, and his treachery."

"He was just trying to hurt me for hurting him." Cammie defended Harry again.

"And he succeeded, didn't he?" Thomas softened his voice at the distraught look on Cammie's face.

"Yes." Cammie couldn't stop the tears that fell as she listened to Harry's vitriolic attack on her again.

"I'm sorry." Thomas pulled Cammie into his arms.

Cammie began to struggle. "No."

"I'm not going to hurt you, Cammie." Thomas held her until all the fight vanished.

Even knowing what the man holding her was likely going to do to Harry, Cammie couldn't help her reaction. After suffering almost a month with a minimum of human contact, none of which had been comforting, the feel of Thomas' arms around her undid her efforts to resist him, and Cammie leant into the embrace and began sobbing.

Thomas soothed Cammie much as he would one of his children. "Please don't cry."

Thomas' softly spoken plea roused Cammie from her almost mindless need to seek comfort. "You've taken me away from my parents and everyone I love. You've made me your apprentice when I don't want to be, and you're holding my former boyfriend over my head. All I want is for everything to be like it was."

"You're right, I'm doing all of those things." Thomas met his niece's eyes. "But things can never be like they were, Cammie. It's too late for me to change things, even if I wanted to."

“You don’t want to change them though, do you?” Cammie already knew the answer.

“I rarely, if ever, second-guess my decisions, Cammie.” Thomas could only think of a mere handful of occasions where he had. “And taking you as my apprentice is not one of them. As you rightfully told me when I first revealed who I was, you’re not powerful like your Uncle but you are still going to be a force to be reckoned with once you’ve mastered everything I can teach you. And that it is the sort of power I want on my side, even if you don’t like being there.”

“Why did you tell me?” Cammie still didn’t understand why Thomas had revealed himself. “You could have remained Dominus, and I’d have been none the wiser.”

“I told you because as my apprentice, you’re included in the Inner Circle. We don’t wear masks when we meet, and I preferred for you to find out who I was in private, rather than exposing you to that sort of shock in front of others.” Thomas explained his reasoning behind his decision to tell her. “And Harry will be finding out today.”

“Why today?” Cammie wiped her eyes as she asked.

“Because his mother is coming here.” Thomas revealed what he had planned for Cammie. “I’ve asked her to give you some lessons on the use of Dark Arts in charms.”

“Will she be allowed to hurt me?” Cammie remembered Thomas’ warning to her.

Thomas shook his head. “No.”

“So for the moment it’s just Harry you’re going to hold to ransom then?” Cammie checked.

“Yes.” Thomas wasn’t backing down from that threat. “I know you’d rather accept the punishments yourself but it doesn’t work that way. I believe you’d happily defy me no matter what I did to you, but that you wouldn’t let others suffer for you.”

Cammie thought about the night her father had suffered for Harry. "So are you going to tell Harry's mother about what he and Dad did?"

"I am." Thomas had been thinking over Harry's deceit as he was talking to Cammie. "And I've decided that it will be Lily who will determine her son's fate."

Fully aware of Lily's vicious streak, Cammie was terrified for Harry. "What is she going to do to him?"

"I don't know." Thomas turned to head towards the door. "It's entirely up to her; she can pretty much do anything she wants."

"Can I do anything to make you change your mind?" Cammie found that she'd do anything if it helped Harry.

Thomas smiled. "It's funny. On the day we found out, or at least we thought we'd found out, that Harry Sebastian was dead, I realized that you'd do anything for Potter, even if you didn't know it then. It's nice to know I was right." He opened the door. "And no, there's nothing you can do. Now I suggest you get ready for dinner."

An Hour Later

Harry Potter's mouth fell open as Thomas escorted Cammie into the dining room. "What's she doing here?"

"Having dinner." Thomas pulled out Cammie's chair for her. "I thought you'd be glad to see your girlfriend here."

"I am." Harry lied, wondering what had possessed Tonks to accept Thomas' proposal. "But I thought she was grounded."

"Obviously not, otherwise she wouldn't be here." Thomas picked up the bottle of red wine and poured some into Harry's glass, before doing the same again to Cammie's glass and then his own. "Which is good because as my apprentice, I think it's important she doesn't leave too long between her lessons."

Cammie's heart leapt into her throat as Harry almost knocked his glass over. Harry stared at Cammie. "Apprentice?"

"Yes, her pilot training." Thomas smiled ingenuously at Harry. "What did you think I meant?"

Relief flooded Harry as he remembered about the theoretical flying lessons that Cammie had been receiving from Thomas once a week before the trouble had erupted, and he shook his head at his own stupidity. "It doesn't matter."

Concealing his amusement at Harry's fright, Thomas conducted a light conversation throughout the first course until a house-elf appeared. "Yes?"

"Guest, Master Thomas." The house-elf bowed and vanished.

Thomas put down his napkin, and stood up. "Please excuse me." He then closed the double doors behind him as he left, leaving the two diners alone.

Harry waited a few moments before hissing at Cammie. "Tonks, I thought you'd be out looking for Cammie. What the hell are you doing here?"

"I was invited." Cammie answered truthfully, her Uncle's warning before dinner still ringing in her ears.

"You didn't have to say yes." Harry glanced at the double doors, listening for footsteps. "Or did Dad ask you to come to keep an eye on me because Cammie got out? If he did, you can go home. I haven't run off with her, nor am I ever likely to."

"You still really hate her, don't you?" Cammie couldn't help herself even though she knew she was opening herself to pain.

“You don’t know what she did, Tonks. None of you do, except for H.J.” Harry’s face reflected all the hurt he’d felt. “If you did, you wouldn’t have to ask.” Hearing footsteps, he fell silent.

Thomas opened the doors. “My guest will be with us momentarily. More wine, Harry?”

Harry shook his head. “I’m not a big drinker.”

“So you don’t take after your counterparts?” Thomas knew that both Sebastians tended to enjoy their alcohol, Harry more so than H.J.

Harry gave a small smile after saying no. “It’s strange isn’t it? Even though we’re all supposed to be the same person, none of us are alike really.”

“You’ve all grown up differently.” Thomas observed. “And upbringing can make a big difference to how a person develops.”

Cammie thought of something else. “And you were all in different houses at Hogwarts. If you’d really been alike, then you’d probably have all been in the same house.”

“Well I definitely think I got the best deal. Slytherin is hard to beat.” As Harry finished speaking, footsteps indicated the imminent arrival of the final guest.

Thomas found himself agreeing with Harry as he waited for Lily to make her entrance. “You’re quite right, Harry. As a former Slytherin myself, I’m hardly going to disagree with you.”

“But I thought...” Harry’s thought about Thomas’ schooling went unfinished as the double doors opened, and Thomas’ guest walked in. “Mum!”

“Hello, Harry, and I take it that it is you this time.” Lily, who was dressed in a white halter-neck dress, walked around the table and kissed Harry’s cheek. “So is it you?”

Realizing only one person could have told Lily about his and H.J.'s artifice, Harry's horrified gaze met Cammie's. "You're not Tonks, are you?"

Cammie shook her head. "No, I'm not."

Thomas got up and put his hand on Cammie's shoulder. "Harry, just in case you've forgotten, this is Carus, my apprentice."

Harry swallowed hard. "And you're not talking about flying this time are you?"

Thomas slowly shook his head from side to side. "No, my fellow Slytherin, I'm not talking about flying."

Harry turned betrayed eyes on Cammie. "Your father would have done better to let Thomas kill you."

Thomas felt Cammie start at Harry's verbal attack. "I believe you owe my niece an apology, Harry."

As frightened as he was, Harry refused. "I owe her nothing."

"You owe her from saving you from a protracted and painful death." Thomas corrected. "I intended to you kill slowly while she watched."

Harry scowled at his former girlfriend. "Guilt finally get to you, did it?"

"I..." Cammie fell silent as Thomas firmly squeezed her shoulder, and she dropped her head.

Lily yawned and got to her feet. "This is all so very touching but we have better things to do, Harry." Lily headed towards the door. "Well, what are you waiting for?"

Harry glanced at Thomas, who was still standing behind Cammie. "So you brought me here for my mother to kill me instead?"

Thomas laughed. "I'd hardly allow anything like that to happen here. I have my children to think about." He waited a moment before continuing. "You're going into Miami."

Harry got to his feet. "Can't have a body on your own doorstep, can you?"

"Quite right, Harry." Thomas squeezed Cammie's shoulder again when he felt her trying to rise. "I'd prefer to let the Muggles do the clean-up." Thomas nodded at Lily. "I'll hold the main course until you return."

"You're too kind." Lily took out her wand and beckoned. "Come along, Harry."

Having no other choice, Harry followed his mother out.

Next Chapter: Cammie learns a harsh lesson; Thomas gets one step closer to deciphering the stone's writing.

Chapter 61: Lessons

As the doors closed, Cammie roused herself from her state of shock. "You can't let her kill him."

"I told you it was entirely up to Lily what she did." Thomas sat down.

Cammie rose to her feet. "I'll never again do as you ask me if you don't stop her. I don't care what I've sworn. I'd rather die."

"But you will do as I say, Cammie." Thomas was completely unaffected by Cammie's stand against him. "While I know I could parade a whole room full of my Death Eaters in front of you and torture them without you truly caring, you'd be a little less reticent to do as you're told if I brought in say, a Muggle child, to teach you some obedience."

Cammie felt disgusted. "You'd use an innocent child against me?"

"You've seen what I can do. What do you think?" Thomas had no intention of doing so, but he knew that Cammie would believe he was capable of it. He nodded towards her seat. "Now sit down."

Just as Harry had had no choice in his fate, Cammie now had none in hers, and she sank back onto her seat, tears threatening once more. "I hate you."

"As I told Mione when she found out who I was, no you don't." Thomas disagreed with her. "You merely hate what I'm forcing you to do."

Ignoring the second sentence, Cammie latched onto the first. "Aunt Mione knows?"

"That bothers you, doesn't it?" Thomas was aware of how much he was upsetting his niece but he wanted her to understand that, despite his love for her, she was still going to have to toe the line like everyone else.

"But she seemed so upset when she thought Uncle Harry was dead." Cammie gave a tiny bitter laugh as she remembered what H.J. had said to her on the night he'd masqueraded as her boyfriend. "And Dad thought I was a good actress."

Thomas relented, but only for his wife's sake, and not Cammie's. "Your aunt is as skilled at acting as you are, but not over something like that."

Cammie was confused. "What do you mean?"

"When I revealed who I was, she managed to lie convincingly to me that your Dad and Uncle were mere scapegoats, and that it was just her who'd been sent here to destroy me; something we both know now isn't true." Thomas explained his comment, before going on. "And even though she admitted she loved me when she found out, she couldn't deal with the truth, so I took the necessary steps to ensure that she didn't have to."

"You obliterated her?" Cammie deduced.

"Yes." Thomas confirmed. "And no, you can't discuss me with her, just in case you think that she offers you a loophole in your oath; she doesn't."

After a long silence, Cammie rose again. "May I be excused?"

"No, you may not." Thomas pointed at her chair. "I expect you to eat dinner with Lily and me when she returns."

The double doors opened before Cammie could respond, and she went even paler and sank back down on her chair with shaking legs when a smiling Lily stepped into the dining room. Upset by the look on Lily's face, Cammie lashed out at her. "You are disgusting. How..."

However, she fell silent as Thomas snapped at her. "Cammie, remember my warning." He then got up and pulled out a chair for Lily, who was smirking at her niece, totally unmoved by her outburst. "How did it go?"

"It could have gone better." Lily thanked Thomas when he poured wine into her glass. "Finding a suitable area to kill someone in a place like Miami isn't always easy. It's so crowded."

Cammie gave a tiny sobbing gasp, and lifted her hand to her mouth.

Thomas ignored her. "I take it that you overcame that problem."

Lily nodded. "I found us a nice quiet side alley."

Cammie started to cry quietly while Thomas continued questioning Lily. "Was it a clean kill?"

"On Harry's part not so much." Lily could see the pure distress that marred Cammie's features. "He was sick to his stomach."

Now uncaring of Thomas' warning, Cammie spoke up again, tears making her voice thick. "You tortured him? Couldn't you at least have had the decency to make it a quick death for him?"

"It was a quick death." Lily bit into a breadstick. "There's nothing drawn out about the killing curse."

Cammie dissolved into more tears, her sobs making it difficult to respond. Her head shot up moments later when the double doors opened again, and pale but very much alive, Harry walked in. Cammie's head swiveled to look at her Uncle. "But..."

Before Cammie could say anything else, Thomas gave Harry an order. "Go to the dueling room, and wait for me."

Harry who, having silently resigned himself to his fate, did as he was told.

"Harry went into Miami to make his first kill, Cammie." Thomas told Cammie before she could try and ask again.

"How could you? You knew what I'd think." Cammie felt betrayed.

"It could so easily have been what you thought it was. Just remember that when I ask you for something." Thomas didn't want his niece to think that the lessons would stop just because she'd been upset earlier. "Consider what happened with Harry as a lesson."

Cammie couldn't hide her dismay. "You made Harry kill someone as a lesson for me?"

"Don't flatter yourself." Lily responded. "Harry made that kill for me, something he's going to have to get used to."

"But you could see from his face that he didn't enjoy it." Cammie hadn't been able to miss the miserable and drawn features that Harry had sported.

Lily lowered her voice and spoke to Cammie as if sharing a confidence. "I admit that Harry really doesn't have the stomach for killing." She gave Cammie a winning smile. "Unlike your father. He didn't seem to have any problem killing that Muggle, did he?"

Fury and hurt filled Cammie, and she smiled just as sweetly back at Lily, barbing her words. "That's probably because he thought it was you."

Lily started to rise back to her feet, her wand flying into her hand. "You little..."

"Lily!" Thomas' voice was hard. "You will restrain yourself to words alone. Now if you'll both excuse me, Harry and I have unfinished business." Thomas then left the two women alone.

Lily sat down and reholstered her wand. "I see you've managed to garner yourself another knight-in-shining-armor to defend you, Cammie."

"Another one?" Cammie responded, the sarcasm in her tone revealing her disdain for Thomas. "I'd hardly call Uncle Thomas that."

"You really have no idea what an honor he's given you, do you?" Lily glared at Cammie.

Cammie was flooded with disbelief. "An honor? You call being forced to watch someone I love being tortured an honor? Harry thinks I don't love him because of Uncle Thomas, and what the two of you did tonight was despicable. No wonder Harry doesn't want anything to do with you."

"Something that's going to change." Lily resisted the temptation to withdraw her wand and shut Cammie up.

"You can't truly think that Harry wants to take up where he left off, can you?" Cammie questioned.

"He has little choice in the matter." Lily took a mouthful of wine. "When I believe I can trust him, he will become fully apprenticed to me again as he should have done before you interfered, especially now that he's fulfilled his obligation to make a first kill."

Cammie loathed what Lily had made Harry do. "A first kill he never wanted to make. The fact that he was sick to his stomach should tell you that. No matter what you do, he'll never become a vicious killer like you."

"Why thank you for the compliment." Lily wasn't the slightest bit perturbed by Cammie's remark about her. "Now while Harry might have had a little trouble with his first kill, at least he's gotten it out of the way." Lily grinned widely before launching her attack. "Which I know is more than you've done."

Cammie visibly paled. "I will never lift a wand against another human being."

"With the right impetus, believe me you will." Lily helped herself to another glass of white wine. "Harry said the same this evening, until I threatened to kill him if he didn't. It's surprising what you'll do when you believe your own life is on the line. He didn't want to die, and I'm sure you won't either when it's your turn. It's something as your sponsor that I look forward to."

Cammie again refuted Lily's words. "I don't care if you are my sponsor. You aren't allowed to touch me, so I won't do it."

"Okay, so I can't touch you. But when the time comes, if you refuse and Harry has to take your place, no matter what Thomas does to me afterwards, I will make you pay if my son dies." Lily was aware that Thomas planned to use Harry to punish Cammie.

"You truly are a piece of work." Cammie hissed at her aunt. "You dare to lecture me about Harry and what will happen to him if I don't kill someone, when you know what's happening to him right now? How can you just calmly sit there while he's being tortured?"

Lily viewed it in a totally different light. "He's being chastised, Camille. There's a difference."

"A difference?" Cammie's voice rose. "How can you say that?"

"Because it's true." Lily was well aware of what Thomas was doing. "What happened to your father that night he took Harry's place was torture, this is chastisement. At worst, Harry might not be able to lie down on his back for a few days."

Cammie's stomach threatened to rebel as she comprehended exactly what Thomas was doing to her former boyfriend. "You are one sick bitch. I don't know how anyone who is supposedly a mother can just sit by and let her child suffer like that."

"I'm doing it because I love my son, and I'd rather see him go through that than..." Lily began, only for Cammie to interrupt her.

Cammie had resumed her sweet smile of earlier. "But he's not your son to love, Lily. Didn't anyone tell you while you were vacationing in Azkaban? Harry carried out the Abrogo Progenitor ritual."

Lily went white. "You're lying."

Aware that she'd finally gotten to Lily, Cammie smirked. "No, I'm not. And do you want to know why he did it, Lily, apart from the fact that

he hates you?" Cammie watched the barb sink home before firing off her largest one of the night. "He did it so that he could be with me."

Lily got to her feet once more and reached across the table, grabbing Cammie by her hair. "Now listen to me, and listen well, you jumped up little slut. Harry is, and always will be my son, no matter what ritual he believes he's done. And there's not going to be any touching reunion, Camille. Harry hates you and I intend to see it remains that way."

Cammie struggled to free herself from Lily's grasp. "Let go of me." When Lily still refused to let go, Cammie lashed out, her fingernails raking down Lily's cheek.

"You will pay for that." Lily let go and transformed.

Thomas chose that moment to return. "Lily, I warned you."

Lily changed back, and asked Thomas about what Cammie had told her. "Is it true about the ritual?"

"Yes." Thomas snapped. "Now get down on your knees."

Lily dropped to the floor without question.

Thomas turned to Cammie. "She's yours to punish as you see fit."

Cammie was horrified, despite what Lily had just done to her. "I'm never going to be like you. Never. If you want to punish her do it yourself." Tears running down her cheeks, Cammie fled.

After Thomas closed the doors, Lily got up. "I think we're going to have to up the ante."

"I think you're right." Thomas observed as he healed Lily's cheek. "She certainly isn't frightened of you but she's also not willing to hurt you voluntarily."

"So we'll try something different." Lily's face turned serious. "How badly did you hurt him?"

"I'm sure he'll live." Thomas remarked, having left the spell to finish off its work while he returned to the dining room. "But he can heal naturally. That should help him to reconsider his options before he offers to help someone again."

The main course suddenly appeared, and, satisfied that Harry would be alright, Lily gave a delighted smile. "Salmon."

"And champagne." Thomas opened the bottle and poured Lily a glass. "I thought you'd like to celebrate your son's first kill properly this time."

"Thank you." Lily took a sip of the sparkling wine. The two of them then changed the subject, and began talking about what Thomas had planned for Cammie.

The girl in question, after fleeing, had run towards her room, only to stop outside of Harry's door. Knocking on it, she pushed it open. "Harry?"

Getting no answer she spelled on the lights to find no-one there. She headed towards the bathroom but it too was in darkness. "Harry?" Still getting no answer, she apparated directly to the dueling room. There she found Harry hanging in chains, bloody lines still appearing across his back. Unable to stand by this time and watch someone else suffer because of her, Cammie ignored Thomas' explicit warning he'd issued before dinner not to interfere with events in any way. Withdrawing her wand, she aimed it at Harry. "Finite."

After ending the spell, Cammie cast cushioning charms before releasing Harry from the chains. Then, grabbing his arm, she apparated him back to his room, before floating him onto the bed so that he lay on his stomach.

Cammie then hunted in the bathroom until she found salve. She hadn't gotten much further than treating his shoulders, when Harry came to with a cry of pain. "Get off me."

"Let me at least finish putting this salve on your back." Cammie pleaded.

"I don't want your help." Harry's back felt as if it was on fire but he knew what would happen if he continued to accept Cammie's help. "You've caused me enough trouble as it is."

"I can't leave you like this." Cammie reached out again.

"I said get off me." Harry snarled, unable to pull away from her. "It's because of you that I'm like this now. So fuck off and leave me alone."

"Harry, please..." Cammie's tears started again.

Harry wasn't moved by them. "Save the tears for someone who gives a shit, Camille; something I know you don't."

Still unable to tell Harry the truth, Cammie knew that Harry wasn't going to believe that she cared. "I know you hate me, Harry, but at least let me heal your back."

"You must think that I'm fucking stupid, Camille." Harry lifted his eyes to meet hers. "Thomas has already warned me that if I attempt to heal my back, then he'll double what he did to me tonight until I leave my back to heal naturally."

Cammie was horrified. "But it will scar."

"Good because then every time I catch sight of it in the mirror, I'll be reminded never to trust a deceitful bitch like you again." Harry turned his head away. "Now unless you've come to gloat, which I suspect was your main reason in coming here, you have no business being in my room. So fuck off."

Her tears flowing down her cheeks like a waterfall, Cammie apparated out, dropping to the floor in her bedroom, and crying until she exhausted herself and finally fell into a restless sleep.

In the dining room, Thomas got up. "I think I'd better go and release your son."

Lily followed Thomas to the dueling room, only to find it empty. "It looks as though Cammie beat us to it."

Angry that she'd dared to disobey him, Thomas marched out of the dueling room, and headed to the other side of the house to Harry's room. He found Harry lying on his stomach, and Thomas assessed his back. "She cancelled the spell and tried to heal you, didn't she?"

Harry glared at him. "I don't know about cancelling the spell as I lost consciousness, but yes, she did try to heal me so I told her to fuck off."

"A wise decision." Thomas left the room with Lily following him. "Why is it when I tell people not to do things, they still do it?"

"Because Cammie is obviously very stupid." Lily was delighted that Thomas was angry about what Cammie had done, and she brought up the subject she'd been taunting Cammie with, aware that Thomas was more likely to acquiesce to her demands now that he was angry with his niece. "When will I be allowed to oversee Cammie making her first kill?"

"Not for a while." Thomas was aware that Cammie was nowhere near ready enough. "But she will be making one. I'm not going to make an exception, not even for her."

Lily was pleased by his answer. "And I can still be her trainer and sponsor?"

After Cammie's stunt, Thomas had a better idea. "No, I think Harry should do it."

Even though she was a little disappointed, Lily couldn't argue with Thomas' sense of irony. "And will he be allowed to punish her during her training?"

About to say no, but still angry about Cammie's interference, Thomas changed his mind. "I think that will be an excellent idea. Harry is going to be heartbroken when he finds out the truth, and what better a lesson to teach than that."

The shine was taken off Lily's happiness by Thomas' words. "You're going to tell him she didn't betray him?"

Entirely aware of Lily's problem, Thomas decided to wait a while to do so. "Yes, but it won't be until he's killed any love she has for him."

Mollified by Thomas' reponse, Lily started making plans for her son. "Good. I can now start to arrange a much more suitable marriage for him. It's a pity Daphne's already become engaged to that Krum fellow."

"I suspect Harry won't be interested for a while." Thomas made a suggestion. "Give him some time to get over Cammie first, and then find someone for him. It's what I intend to do with Cammie."

Lily was even more delighted that the girl would no longer be able to get her claws into Lily's son. "Do you have anyone in mind for her?"

"Fultus." Thomas wasn't surprised when Lily seemed a little put out. "You have a problem with him?"

"Only that he's a pureblood, and she doesn't deserve him." Lily shrugged dismissively. "Then again he was a Hufflepuff."

Thomas laughed, well aware of how much Lily disliked their niece and the Hufflepuff house. "A very skilled Hufflepuff, Lily, otherwise I doubt he'd have made it as Regulus' apprentice."

"Will you be allowing Rupert and Lucius to take apprentices?" Of the Inner Circle, so far only she and Regulus had been granted the privilege.

"Lucius chose his apprentice yesterday." Thomas informed her.

"Anyone special?" Lily knew whom she would have picked.

Thomas confirmed her choice. "Zabini. I was thinking of offering his wife to Rupert. Wardbreaking is a skill that runs in the Weasley family so I thought it appropriate."

"I think that would be a good idea." Lily was aware that another skilled wardbreaker of Rupert's caliber would be a bonus. "So have you decided on a name for me yet?"

Having already christened everyone else with an alternate name, Lily now remained the only member of the Inner Circle not to have one. "Everyone already knows who you are but if you want a name, I'll be happy to give you one."

"I would." Lily confirmed.

"Then I think..." Thomas hesitated as he thought about the names he'd mulled over before settling on one. "...Vipereus is a suitable name."

"That would be most agreeable." Lily liked it. "Thomas, why did you give the name Amicus to Regulus? I thought that that name would have been reserved for the Sirius Black you knew."

"Because of what it means to the Sebastians." Thomas had given it long and careful thought before offering it to Regulus. "Harry Sebastian, in particular, is aware of what a vicious killer Amicus was, and he'll be left wondering who is now behind the mask, and whether he is the same kind of man Sirius Black was."

"But Regulus isn't a vicious killer." Lily pointed out. "Even though he can hold his own in a fight, his brother outclasses him as a dueler."

"As did Sirius in my world, but Regulus is my friend, and with you fulfilling Amicus' spot, he has no need to do little but assume the mantle for Harry and Sirius to believe that I've found someone to replace the Amicus I knew." Thomas explained. "Either way, it's going to annoy them tremendously."

The Next Morning

Cammie found herself at the breakfast table, Thomas forcing her to attend. She ignored the food in front of her, as well as her Uncle.

Thomas in turn ignored Cammie's sullenness. "You ended the spell and released Harry, didn't you?"

"Yes." Cammie was surprised Thomas had even bothered to ask. "I was hardly going to leave him hanging there like that."

"Yet you didn't finish healing his back." Thomas observed.

"That's because he wouldn't let me as you made it impossible for him to do so." Cammie retorted in a snotty voice.

"He still wants nothing to do with you, does he?" Thomas bit into his toast, annoyed at Cammie's insolent tone but not showing it.

"You know he doesn't." Cammie's stomach rumbled, and she reluctantly started on her own breakfast.

"A pity because I've decided that he'll be taking over your training." Thomas picked up the newspaper. "Starting tomorrow."

"But he hates me." Cammie cried out.

"You should have thought about that before you interfered when I specifically told you not to." Thomas unfolded the newspaper. "And just so you know, I've also decided that I'm no longer going to be punishing Harry for your insubordination."

Cammie's appetite fled again. "You're going to use a Muggle child against me instead?"

"No." Thomas met his niece's eyes. "You're going to get what you wanted. You're going to be taking your own punishment."

"You said you wouldn't hurt me." In spite of her brave words previously, Cammie now found herself more than a little afraid.

"And I'm not going to." Thomas found the section he wanted to read first. "As I've already said, Harry will be taking over your training."

As Thomas' meaning sank in, Cammie went white. "Harry can punish me?"

"That's what I believe I said." Thomas lifted the paper. "Now if you'll excuse me, I'd like to read my paper."

Cammie fled yet again.

Three Days Later

Almost twenty minutes later than she should have been there, Cammie entered the dueling room, to find not only Harry waiting for her, but Thomas and Lily as well. She ignored them and addressed Harry. "I wasn't sure you'd be fit enough."

Harry hadn't been able to move until the day before, delaying Thomas' scheduling of Cammie's training with Harry. "But I am now."

"Harry, I..." Cammie tried to apologize to him yet again.

Harry didn't want to hear it. "Just so you know, Thomas has decided that until you make your first kill, you're going to be my apprentice. And accordingly I've decided on a new name for you, 'Mortifer'." At Cammie's puzzled look, Harry sighed. "It means death-bringer. We really must work on your Latin."

"But I've never killed anyone." Cammie protested.

Harry disagreed. "You killed that Muggle in Miami and the one your father killed as surely as if you'd held the wand yourself."

Cammie went onto the defensive. "I didn't force you to help me, and you'd have to kill someone if I hadn't stepped in."

Harry glanced at Thomas, who was watching silently. "Something I truly now regret. All I did was delay the inevitable, which is exactly what you're doing. So take your position."

Just as Cammie began to move, Harry called out her name. "I almost forgot. Come here."

At the gloating look on Lily's face, Cammie hesitated. "Why?"

"Just do it, Camille." Harry ordered, his face cold and forbidding.

Cammie had never been frightened of Harry before; now she was, and she refused. "No."

Harry promptly marched over as she backed up, and he grabbed her arm. "I have a little gift for you."

As Cammie struggled to free herself, Harry placed his wand against Cammie's wrist. "Before you refuse my gift, I suggest you remember that I'm returning home in three days."

Cammie didn't believe what he was insinuating. "You would never hurt my family just because of me."

"Your father blames me for what's happened to you. When you first portkeyed away, H.J. would have hurt me if Harry hadn't stepped in. So tell me, Camille, are you willing to take the chance that I'm not going to hold it against him?" Harry asked. "Because I've killed once already, and right now I feel as if I have nothing left to lose."

Not wanting to believe that Harry would truly harm her father, but filled with enough doubt to consider the possibility, Cammie stopped fighting against him, and she defiantly stuck out her chin. "Just do it then, you bastard."

Choosing to ignore Cammie's insult, Harry incanted a slightly altered curse from the usual one Thomas would have made; the change allowing someone other than Thomas to inflict the Dark Mark but still causing the new owner of it to be bound to Thomas. "Morsmordre Concateno Thomas Seville."

Cammie's attempts to get free began again in earnest, as pain lanced up her arm and spread throughout her body, and she began to

scream. Harry, however, held onto her wrist until the Dark Mark had been completed, before releasing her.

Dropping to the ground, Cammie started to weep. Harry stood over her. "Tomorrow you'll be here on time, Mortifer." He then stormed out.

Lily followed her son to his room, closing the door behind them. She handed over a pain potion. "Your back must be hurting after trying to hold her like that."

It was, and Harry snatched the vial off her. "You look happy about what I did."

"I am." Lily met her son's black-eyed stare. "Come on, Harry, you can't tell me that you didn't enjoy doing that to her after what she's done to you."

Harry drank the potion. "Would it have mattered if I hadn't?"

"No." Lily admitted. "But didn't you enjoy it, just a little bit?"

Harry's face contorted with disgust, and he refrained from answering the question. "I've done everything you have asked me to, now it's time to keep your end of the bargain."

Lily pulled out her wand and placed it against her heart. "I swear on my life and my magic that I will leave James Potter and Severus Snape alone unless either of them attacks me first."

Harry was satisfied as a white light washed over Lily and she shivered, rather than collapsing like most people. "Now get out."

Smirking, Lily left.

In the dueling room, Thomas handed over a pain potion. "Drink this."

Wanting to hurl it across the room in defiance, Cammie grabbed it to throw it but hesitated at the last moment, her pain overcoming her anger. "Why?"

"You needed to be taught a lesson. I warned you not to interfere with anything that happened that night, and you wilfully disobeyed me." Thomas took hold of her wrist and examined her Dark Mark. "Not bad for his first time."

"He betrayed you, so why are you letting him do this?" Cammie asked, still not understanding why Harry would be granted permission to treat her as he had, particularly in light of his betrayal of Thomas.

"Because Harry took his punishment without complaint. And he's now fulfilled his obligations to me." Thomas informed Cammie.

"By inflicting this on me?" Cammie shoved her wrist in Thomas' face.

"I certainly didn't force him to do it." Thomas answered truthfully. Lily had done so instead by blackmailing Harry; Lily having thought up the idea on the night Cammie had aided Harry. Thomas had agreed to Lily's plan as he was very much aware that the Dark Mark he'd placed on Cammie's ring would soon fail and wouldn't work if reapplied. Also Thomas had not wanted to have to be the one to inflict the Dark Mark on his niece.

"He really hates me then, doesn't he?" Cammie's voice was woebegone, not realizing that even though he hated Cammie now, Harry had only agreed to do it to save his father and Severus.

"Given what he's just done to you, I'd say that you've made a fair assessment of the situation." Thomas stood up. "Now why don't you go lie down for a while?"

Cammie's upper lip curled in disdain as she climbed to her feet. "Don't pretend you care about me anymore."

"I do care about you." Thomas went to reach out to touch his niece's arm.

"Is that why you got Harry to do what you couldn't?" Cammie's meaning was evident.

Something that wasn't lost on Thomas. "I am no coward, Cammie. And unless you want me to forget that I do care about you, and I find myself giving you a second Dark Mark to keep that one company, I suggest you remove yourself from my presence."

Cammie knew she'd gone too far, and hurriedly left the room.

Next Day

Harry stood behind Cammie as she cried over the puppy she'd just been unable to kill, having been forced to watch as Harry killed it instead. "You're pathetic."

Cammie turned on him. "You might have sold your soul, but I haven't."

Harry laughed. "Don't kid yourself. You sold your soul the moment you accepted your Uncle's offer of help to practice the Dark Arts."

"He told you?" Cammie turned her back on the puppy's body.

"Yes." Harry opened the next box in the row. "Just as he told me that you accepted his offer to join him when you didn't have to, or are you going to deny it?"

"No." Cammie couldn't.

"In that case, I suggest you get on with it." Harry pointed to the kitten. "You fail this time, and you'll be on the receiving end of my next spell, not the kitten."

By the end of the day, Cammie still hadn't managed to kill anything, and she slunk miserably out of the dueling room, Lily passing her as she left in tears.

Lily watched as Harry transfigured the live animals back into stuffed toys. "You aren't using real animals?"

"You may enjoy cleaning up animal carcasses. I don't." Harry aimed his wand at the boxes causing them to fly into a corner.

Lily stepped in front of Harry when he attempted to leave the room. "Does she know that they're not real?"

"No." Harry had taken the idea from Harry Sebastian's memory of his own training. "It would make the whole thing pointless if she did."

"Are you sure you're not doing it to spare her?" Lily wanted to make certain of her son's feelings for her niece.

Harry gave a bitter laugh, and unbuttoned his shirt, turning his back on his mother. "Take a good look at my back, Mum. I'm going to be walking around with a reminder of what she did for the rest of my life. Why the fuck would I want to spare her anything?" With that Harry dragged his shirt back on and stormed off.

9th December 2007

Harry portkeyed back into Grimmauld Square to be met by James who asked how his week had gone. "Fine."

James placed a hand on his arm. "Is everything alright, Harry?"

"Yes, why?" Harry pulled free of his Dad's grasp.

"I just thought you might still be upset about Cammie." James said gently. "We still haven't found her."

Harry wasn't exactly shocked at the news. "And I doubt you will."

Something in Harry's tone made James wonder if his son knew where she was. "Harry, did you help her?"

"If she was dying in front of me, I wouldn't lift a finger to help her." Harry snapped, making his feelings for his ex-girlfriend clear.

"I'm sorry." James could see that Harry was upset by his remark. "That was unfair of me to ask given that I can only guess how much she's hurt you."

"It doesn't matter." Harry's voice was cold. "She's never going to be in a position to hurt me again." About to walk away, Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out the box that he hadn't been able to give up until then. "And I won't need this ever again."

James opened up the box. "I'll put back in the vault. When you need it out again, I'll arrange for..."

Harry cut him off. "Dad, I'm never going to need it."

"Harry, it might seem like that now, but you'll change your mind." James assured him.

"No, I won't." Harry glanced at the ring that was winking at him in the lamplight. "If Camille has taught me one thing, it's that women, no matter how sweet and innocent they appear to be, are nothing of the sort."

James again placed a hand on Harry's arm. "Don't let one bad experience ruin your life, Harry."

"You're too late with the warning, Dad." Harry shut the lid on the box that was sitting open on James' hand. "I've learnt my lesson the hard way, and I have no intention of going through it again." He smiled briefly at James. "I'm going to unpack, and I'll see you at dinner."

James let his hand drop away as he pocketed the box, and Harry left the room.

17th December 2007

Rupert shook his head. "I'm struggling to make head or tail of this part of the stone. I know eight different languages, smatterings of fourteen others, and I'd recognize a lot more than that but I've never seen this one before."

"Do you know someone who might?" Thomas asked in frustration.

"If I knew what base language it was, I'd be able to pinpoint someone to help." Rupert tiredly rubbed his eyes. "But I don't even have the first clue where to start."

Despite his anger, Thomas could see that Rupert was exhausted. "Take a break for a few days. Perhaps coming at it from a fresh perspective will help."

"Thanks." Rupert gratefully took his things and apparated out.

Grimmauld Square

Thomas knocked on his wife's door. "Mione, I need your help."

Mione's interest was immediately piqued. "What with?"

"I've managed to get my hands on some writings for my collection that I'm having trouble classifying." Thomas knew that if anyone could track down the origin of the writings, it would be his wife.

Reaching her hand out for the piece of paper that Thomas held, Mione offered her help. "This looks interesting."

"Do you think you'll be able to decipher it?" Thomas knew it was asking a lot of his wife. "A translation spell failed."

Mione wasn't surprised when she considered the strange language. "I might be able to track down what it is by using the internet. But I'll have to scan this in, and get back to you on it. Is it urgent?"

"It's just something I'd like to get to the bottom of." Thomas avoided answering the question outright.

"Leave it with me." Mione placed the paper on her desk.

Two weeks later, Thomas was working in his study when Mione knocked on the door, the piece of paper he'd given her in her hand. "Have you got news for me?"

Mione nodded. "It took quite some doing but I'm almost certain this is Paelignian."

"Paelignian?" Thomas had never heard of the language.

"Yes." Mione then launched into what she'd discovered. "It's an ancient language of East-central Italy. It was the language of the Paeligni. They lived in part of what is now the Abruzzi but unfortunately very few inscriptions exist now, with most of them deriving from the 1st century BC."

"Were you able to translate any of it?" Thomas wondered how well his wife had done.

"Just one word - forever." Mione handed over the paper. "Paelignian is not only an ancient language but an extinct one as well which explains why the translation spell didn't work. I doubt you'll ever be able to translate this."

"Thanks anyway." Thomas placed the paper into his desk. "Would you like to go out to dinner?"

Mione smiled happily. "I would."

"Get dressed up then." Thomas rose to his feet. "I'll take you to dinner and then dancing."

Mione's smile widened. "You're in a good mood."

"And because of that I'd like to take my wife dancing." Thomas opened the study door. "So get showered, and I'll meet you back here at seven."

After kissing Thomas on the cheek, Mione headed for her bedroom to get ready. Thomas apparated out the moment she'd disappeared at the top of the stairs.

Rupert almost jumped out of his skin as a crack sounded behind him. "Thomas, you startled me."

Thomas handed over the paper. "My wife used the internet to track down the language. It's Paelignian."

"I've heard of it but I haven't seen it in any written form." Rupert explained his deficiency in not being able to work it out. "And I refuse to use that monstrosity of a computer."

Thomas was used to Rupert's reluctance to deal with anything that wasn't in a book. "Find me someone who can translate this."

"I'll do my best." Rupert promised.

"I'm sure you will." Thomas' words held a word of warning. "I expect a name by Monday morning."

Rupert groaned as he sat down. "It looks as though my weekend has vanished."

31 January 2008

Rupert bowed before Thomas. "I've finally finished translating the stone."

"And the translator who helped you?" Thomas didn't want any loose ends.

"Dead." Rupert had received strict instructions on what to do with the man who'd taken more than a month to track down. "It appears that the date when the ruby should be inserted into its intended vessel is 21 December 2012."

"The date the Mayans predicted will be the end of the world?" Thomas asked as he connected the date with what he'd read.

"The same." Rupert confirmed. "But it's obviously not going to be the end of the world as everyone envisages. It's going to be the end of the world they know because you'll come to power on that day."

"So what exactly will I have to do to make it happen?" Thomas couldn't believe that it would be as simple as just inserting the ruby into a vessel.

"Shed some blood, incant the Fountain of Youth spell, and you have to do it in the Death Chamber, I believe." Rupert shuffled through the papers he'd brought with him. "Roughly translated, the relevant part of the text states:

'Journey to the Island across the sea; On the shores seeks the sacred portal; Incant the spell and annoint the portal with the liquid of life; With the sword to receive life immortal.'

Mione's translation of 'forever' was essentially correct but she hadn't quite got it right."

Thomas was more interested in a problematic part of the text, not his wife's initial translation. "What sword?"

"I believe it's the sword that belonged to Godric Gryffindor." Rupert held out a sketch of the sword. "It's described on the translation stone as being silver and set with rubies, and made by a race of warriors. There's also a single hollow in it, where I believe the ruby you hold needs to be placed."

Thomas knew only too well where the Sword of Gryffindor currently resided. "So I have until December 2012 to take Hogwarts and the Ministry."

"I believe so." Rupert answered.

"You've done well." Thomas took the papers from Rupert. "As a reward I have recently received a shipment of rare books; they're yours."

Rupert preferred such gifts to money. "Thank you."

"No, thank you." Thomas glanced over the notes. "I'll arrange for the books to be transferred to your apartment."

Taking the hint, Rupert inclined his head, and departed to leave Thomas alone with the papers and his thoughts.

Next Chapter: We move forward in time.

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Chapter 62: There's More Than One Way to Skin a Cat

July 27th 2007

Cammie limped back to take her place at the base of the dais, her two opponents unable to follow as they were now lying unconscious on the floor.

Cedric reached out and let his fingertips brush her hand, before letting them fall away as the final apprentice made her way onto the floor. He whispered quietly, believing only Cammie would be able to hear with the background noise. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine." Cammie shifted her weight to her good leg. "I hate these bloody demonstrations."

"You're not alone." Cedric whispered back. "How long before she takes a hit?"

"Two minutes." Cammie didn't think that Ginny was up to the two Death Eaters she was facing. "If I win, you buy dinner."

"Four minutes and you're on." Cedric let his fingertips touch hers again, before turning his attention to the duel when Harry Potter's head swung around in their direction.

As he watched Cedric, Harry Potter knew that he was now hated by both Cedric and Cammie. As Thomas had predicted to Lily, as Harry's training of Cammie had continued, she'd begun to turn on Harry. The more Harry had pushed, the more she'd rebelled against him, culminating in an all-out duel, which Harry had ended by placing the Cruciatus curse on Cammie, after she'd sent a spell at him which had opened a deep gash from Harry's ankle to his hip. Thomas had punished Harry for going too far in his anger, but it had served its purpose. Cammie no longer defended Harry for anything, and she had turned to Cedric for friendship. Harry, however, suspected it might be

more, as the two of them were always whispering together and holding hands; something Harry was aware that Thomas wholly approved of, even though Cedric was no longer available as a marriage partner for Cammie because he'd married Cho Chang a few months earlier.

As the duel ended, Cammie whispered quietly to Cedric. "Chinese will be wonderful." They then made their way out of the room.

Cedric was scowling behind his mask. This was the fourth time in a row that Cammie had called a result correctly. "My wish is your command."

"So it should be." Cammie stood aside to let Thomas and the Inner Circle pass, all five apprentices inclining their heads, before they followed the Circle upstairs.

Cedric had just reached the top of the staircase when behind him, Cammie yelped and, arms flailing, fell backwards as her injured leg gave way. "Catch her."

Behind her, Harry stood firm, grabbing Cammie as she cannoned into him. "I've got you."

When she realized who'd caught her, Cammie tried to pull free. "Thank you, but I can manage."

Harry ignored her. "I'll help you upstairs."

Cedric's scowl grew bigger but he knew that no-one could see it. "I can take Mortifer from here."

"That's fine, Fultus. I have her." Harry didn't particularly like Cedric, and although he liked Cammie even less, he held on to her to annoy the other apprentice.

Aware he was being scrutinized, Cedric bit back his retort. "Thank you, Amo."

Harry's name, meaning 'to love', had been given to him by his mother, and he loathed it. "You are both more than welcome."

Cammie knew that Cedric disliked Harry immensely, and tried to free herself from his grip. "As I said, I think I can actually walk."

"Better to be safe than sorry." Harry responded as he tightened his grip a little more.

All five apprentices once again inclined their heads on entering Thomas' rooms, each murmuring, 'My Master' to the Inner Circle members in deference to their status. Soon they were all seated, Harry deliberately sliding in beside Cammie.

Thomas stood up and removed his mask, indicating that everyone else should do the same. He didn't miss the tight look on Cedric's face at Harry's deliberate move to block Cedric from sitting by his niece. "Cammie, are you alright?"

"Yes, Uncle Thomas, thank you." Cammie acknowledged. "It's just a flesh wound."

"See Rivers before you leave." Thomas instructed, before turning to the others. "Your displays were extremely sloppy today, with only one of you managing to live up to the standards I expect. You will all, with the exception of Harry, meet me tomorrow morning in the dueling room at ten."

Cammie, Blaise, Ginny, and Cedric hid their dismay, as all four knew that Thomas would wipe the floor with them. Only Cammie had no fear of punishment being inflicted upon her by Thomas; Harry still being the only one allowed to harm her.

After a little more discussion, everyone disbanded, and Harry held out his hand to Cammie. "I'll take you to see Rivers. I want to make sure you're fit for your training." Harry let his eyes meet Cedric's, not bothering to hide his smirk at the annoyance on the older man's face.

Cedric inclined his head politely at Harry, before taking Cammie's hand and kissing it. "Cammie, I'll wait for you in the apartment." Cedric knew his comment would piss Harry off.

"I won't be long." Having little choice, Cammie let Harry lead her out and take her to see Healer Rivers. On arriving back at her apartment, she snarled out a single word. "Bastard."

"Tell me something I don't know." Cedric had wanted to punch Harry. "When Thomas asks who I want to fight against in the next demonstration, I'm going to ask to fight against Potter."

Cammie frowned. "Do you think that's a good idea?"

"No." Cedric was aware that Harry easily now outclassed him, although that hadn't been the case six months ago. "But I'm fed up of his sniffing around you when he's well aware that you don't like him."

"He's hardly sniffing around me, Cedric." Cammie moved to put her arms around Cedric's waist. "He hates my guts."

Cedric kissed Cammie lightly on the nose. "Probably but I still don't like it."

"Let's just forget about him." Cammie didn't want to talk about Harry.

Cedric decided to change the subject. "In that case, let's find something else to talk about instead." Cedric was about to make a suggestion when a crack interrupted them. He turned to find Thomas standing there. Releasing Cammie, Cedric inclined his head. "Thomas."

"Cedric, Cammie." Thomas walked into the dining area of the apartment. "I wanted to drop by and see how Cammie was."

"I really am okay." Cammie assured her Uncle, who despite her continued animosity towards him, still carried on making sure that, outside of Harry's attentions towards her, she remained well.

“Good. I've decided that I want you to step up your training with Harry. You've mastered every other spell except for the killing curse. And I expect you to have mastered it by the time your birthday arrives, Cammie. Please don't disappoint me.” Having divulged the real reason behind his visit, Thomas then left.

In the wake of Thomas' ultimatum, Cammie discovered that her legs were shaking, and she slumped onto a barstool. “I'm scared, Ced.”

“Don't be.” Cedric stood behind Cammie, sliding his arms around her waist and linking his hands over her stomach. “I'll take care of you.”

“I still can't do it, Ced.” Cammie leant back against him. “Uncle Thomas is right. While I've managed to excel at every Dark Arts spell that Harry and Uncle Thomas have thrown at me, even after all this time, I still can't manage the killing curse.”

Cedric made an offer. “Let me help you.”

“You know you're forbidden to.” Cammie wished her friend could help her. “Ced, I'm not really good company tonight, so let's forget about the food. I'm going to take a bath and go to bed instead.”

Cedric was disappointed. “Are you sure?”

“I am.” Cammie kissed him lightly and when he left, headed into her bathroom.

Two Days Later

“You're pathetic. It's been eight months, Sebastian.” Harry snapped at Cammie. “A five year old could manage this after that long.”

“Fuck you.” Cammie had just about had enough of her former boyfriend.

“Infissum” Harry barked out, and another cut opened across the back of Cammie's hands, to join the other ones there.

Her hands throbbing, Cammie lifted her wand again and looked down at the tiny kitten that was mewling softly, before bursting into tears and fleeing.

Regulus was almost knocked over by Cammie who, with tears in her eyes, hadn't seen him. "Slow down."

"Get out of the way then." Cammie snarled before identifying that it was Regulus by his mask. "I'm sorry, Amicus." As anyone could be walking by, she addressed Regulus by the name that Thomas had christened him with.

"Don't worry about it." Regulus dismissed her apology. "Amo again?"

Cammie nodded. "He won't let up."

This wasn't the first time that Regulus had seen Cammie upset by Harry, and he looked down at her bloody hands. "His method isn't working, is it?"

Cammie shook her head. "I just can't do it, and Dominus expects me to succeed by the time I turn seventeen."

"Meet me in the dueling room tomorrow at seven, after dinner." Regulus instructed. "And don't bother showing up tomorrow for your lesson with Amo." He then strode off in the direction of Thomas' rooms.

The Next Evening

Cammie stood nervously in the dueling room, not knowing what to expect from Regulus, who she didn't really know that well. "Good evening."

"Good evening, Cammie." Regulus responded as he locked the doors, increasing Cammie's nervousness even more. "You can take your mask off now."

Cammie relaxed as she comprehended why he'd locked the doors, when he removed his own mask. "Thank you."

Regulus led her over to the table he'd already set up. He could see Cammie's face filling with apprehension as she spotted the different size boxes that were lined up on it. "Don't worry, there's nothing in them. We both know that Potter's method isn't working, so we're going to be trying something a little different. Take out your wand."

Cammie unholstered her wand. "Okay."

Regulus pointed to the smallest box. "Cast the killing curse on it."

Cammie thought he was joking. "You want me to kill the box?"

"That's what I said." Regulus pointed again. "Go ahead."

Fifteen blackened boxes later, Cammie was starting to feel weary. "Why am I killing boxes?"

"Do you feel tired?" Regulus asked. When Cammie nodded, he told her why she'd been destroying empty boxes. "This is just about whether you can even cast the curse. It doesn't matter what you're aiming at. It's obvious from your exhaustion, and the state of the boxes that you can cast the curse, so tomorrow we're moving on to live things." Cammie's face fell, and Regulus explained. "It's only going to be plants, so don't start fretting." Given how effortlessly she'd mastered the Dark Arts, Regulus was convinced that Cammie's block was purely mental; her reluctance to take a human life being at the root of her failure.

By the end of the next evening, Cammie had managed to make the smaller plants wilt, and she'd also killed some of the insects that had been on them, but she'd had no luck with the bigger ones. "I should be able to do it; I killed the insects."

“The larger plants are as alive as insects, but because they’re far bigger, they therefore take more energy to kill.” Regulus pointed out. “Once you’ve got the hang of the spell, it will become increasingly easier.” He picked up his mask. “I can’t come tomorrow night, so take a break, but make sure you’re here on Wednesday.”

August 20th 2007

Cammie stared in horror at the eight foot tall venom spitting demon that was chained to the far wall. Cammie's deadline of her birthday had been extended by Thomas at Regulus' request, as Regulus had discerned that rushing Cammie would be counterproductive. He was proved right when, as time had gone by and she no longer felt under pressure, Cammie had managed to dispatch small insects, rats, frogs, toads and the like; Regulus ensuring that nothing she had to kill would invoke a sense of distaste. Then, five days earlier he'd brought in a strange looking creature which Regulus had explained was a demon that ripped the hearts out of small defenseless animals. Having also brought in a box of kittens that Cammie would have to defend, by the end of the evening, Cammie had managed to kill the demon; any reluctance brushed aside by her fears of what the creature would do to the kittens if she didn't.

Now she faced something far bigger and more humanoid looking than anything else she'd had to deal with thus far. “What is that thing?”

“A Venenificus Demon.” Regulus had procured it through a contact at the Watchers Council. “It spits venom that is toxic to Muggles; it would hurt if it contacted your skin but unlike Muggles, you’d survive. It preys on the weak and defenseless.”

“And you want me to kill it?” Cammie’s voice was shaking.

“Yes.” Regulus turned Cammie to face it. “I’m going to count down from five, and then I’ll release it. Take out your wand.”

Cammie did as he asked, her hand shaking visibly. “I’m ready.”

“Five, four, three, two, one.” Regulus pulled out his wand and released the demon, keeping his wand ready in case Cammie failed.

Cammie’s heart was in her mouth as the demon rushed towards them. “Avada Kedavra.” The words came out as a squeak, terror almost robbing her of her voice. The green light hit the demon but it continued rushing forward.

From behind Cammie, a second green light shot forth, Regulus’ words coming out calmly but steadily. “Avada Kedavra.” The demon collapsed to the ground.

Cammie turned around, her face pale. “Why didn’t my spell work?”

“You didn’t put enough power into it because you let fear override everything else.” Regulus explained. “So we’ll try it again.” He flicked his wand at the demon and it shot backwards against the wall, the chains once again ensuring it was secured.

“It isn’t dead?” Cammie couldn’t think why else Regulus would chain it up again.

“No.” Regulus turned her into position again. “The killing curse doesn’t work against it; it just stops it if there’s enough power behind it. I’d have to cut its head off to kill it.”

At the end of the evening, even though she hadn’t managed to drop the demon, as Regulus did every time, Cammie had managed to stop it in its tracks, before it resumed its headlong rush to attack her.

Regulus was almost as exhausted as Cammie when he finally called a halt. “That’s enough for this evening. Make sure you eat well tomorrow, and don’t practice any spells; it will help with your magical reserves. We’ll keep working on him until you finally succeed.”

12 November 2007

Cammie stared at the man chained to the wall. “No.”

“He’s not human, even though he looks that way.” Regulus indicated the spot that he wanted Cammie to move to. “He’s a Parvulus Demon. He eats children, and not just any children. He prefers magical ones.”

“I’ve never heard of a Parvulus demon before.” Cammie unholstered her wand.

“They’re very rare.” Regulus stepped behind her.

Cammie stared uncertainly at the demon. “He really does look human.”

“Trust me, he’s not. Now, on my mark, you’ll have thirty seconds before he reaches you. While he prefers children, he won’t hesitate to kill you. But as he preys on them at night when everyone is sleeping, he isn’t particularly fast moving.” Regulus counted down. “Two, one, mark.”

Cammie raised her wand, and lowered it again, as the demon began to walk towards her with all the speed of a snail.

“Ten seconds.” Regulus warned, his own wand moving in readiness. When Cammie failed, he stunned it. “What happened?”

“He looks too human.” Cammie protested.

“He doesn’t in the moment before he attacks.” Regulus informed her as he reattached the demon to the wall. “Let’s do it again.”

Again Cammie failed. “I can’t do it.”

“It’s a demon, Cammie.” Regulus reiterated in a firm voice.

As the test was reset, Cammie stared at the demon that looked so human, and was once more hesitant to attack as it advanced slowly upon her. Regulus again found himself having to stun the demon, before he turned to Cammie. “This time I’m not going to stun it if you fail. You will have to deal with it yourself.”

"But I thought you'd help me if I couldn't do it." Cammie's voice was shaking as she glanced over at the man chained to the wall.

"I have been helping you but no more." Regulus knew that Cammie was failing because she was letting her visual perception of the demon override what he was telling her. "I know you're more than capable of taking it down."

Cammie stood shaking as Regulus released the demon, and she got ready to stun it, rather than kill it. However, just before it reached her, Regulus whispered quietly to her. "I believe in you, Cammie."

At his words, Cammie was suddenly overcome with a cold calm, and she raised her wand as her voice rang out clearly and with force. "Avada Kedavra."

When the green light dissipated, a body lay on the floor. Cammie was all at once filled with dismay that it still looked human. "Why hasn't it changed?"

Regulus didn't answer the question. "Even though you finally did it, you still hesitated, Cammie. Why?"

"Even after what you told me, for one moment I wondered if it might be a Muggle after all." Cammie admitted.

"Yet you still used the killing curse on it." Thomas' voice came from behind them, as he dropped the silencing and cloaking spells he'd placed on himself. "Well done, Cammie."

"Uncle Thomas." Cammie hadn't realized that he'd been observing her.

Thomas spoke to Regulus before saying anything else to Cammie. "You were right, and I believe this is yours."

Cammie watched as Thomas handed over a large bag, the sound it made telling her that it contained money. "You had a bet on me?"

“No.” Thomas disabused her of her notion. “I told Regulus that if he succeeded where Potter had failed before Christmas, then he’d receive a bonus.”

“And how was that success determined?” Cammie’s voice was clipped.

“You still killed the demon even though you suspected it might be a Muggle.” Thomas defined the meaning of success. “And while it was only a demon, it means you’re a step closer to making your first kill.”

Cammie defended her decision to kill the demon. “I only killed it because at the last moment I made the decision to trust Regulus’ statement that it was a demon. And I don’t care what you do to me; I’m not taking a human life. I just can’t do it.”

“Regulus said you wouldn’t be ready yet, and I have to agree with him.” Thomas wasn’t about to embarrass himself and Cammie by having her fail, but he was still going to force her to bend to his will. “When he determines you’re ready, then it will happen, but for now I think you’ve earned a reward, and a break. Regulus, I have to get home to Mione but I think my niece deserves an outing. Would you mind taking her to buy something nice?” Thomas reached into his pocket and took out a card. “You can spend any amount you want within reason.”

Cammie refused the card. “I have money of my own, but I would like to buy a few things.” After having to purchase what she needed up until then by owl order, the temptation of finally being allowed to go somewhere that wasn’t either Castrum House or her apartment was too much to resist.

Thomas put the card away, before issuing a warning. “While you’re out, do not attempt to disappear. I would not only punish Regulus and Diggory for it, but also one Muggle for every day you stay away.”

“I understand, but where would I go anyway?” Cammie met her Uncle’s eyes. “It’s been over a year since I left; my friends and family

believe I betrayed them, and I'd be in a cell in New Azkaban before the dust had even settled from my apparition."

"True." Thomas walked off.

Regulus held out the bag. "Take it."

"I have the money Uncle Thomas pays me." Cammie informed him. "As well as money in Gringotts."

"And while the goblins are in general a discreet bunch, I still have no doubt that word would reach either your Uncle or my brother that you were at Gringotts." Regulus was aware that a few of the goblins were actually in the Ministry's back pocket. "So take it."

Cammie refused. "I've got money upstairs."

Regulus took out his wand and divided the purse into two. "That maybe so, but I'd still like you to take half. I wouldn't have it if you hadn't succeeded."

Acknowledging the truth in Regulus' words, Cammie took the divided purse. "How much is in here?"

"A thousand galleons." Regulus took her arm.

"A thousand galleons! I don't need that much to spend on a new outfit." Aware of an upcoming dinner that Thomas had told her she'd be expected to attend, Cammie had decided to treat herself to a new dress and some shoes, which up until that day would have been chosen by mail order.

"It's up to you what you spend on an outfit." Regulus let go of her arm as he realized something. "You'll need a cloak. I'll meet you back here in a few minutes."

"I don't have one." Cammie hadn't needed one up until then, using warming spells if she went into the gardens.

Regulus took her arm once more. "Then let's remedy that."

Cammie had never been in Regulus' rooms before, and her mouth fell open in amazement at the sight that met her eyes when Regulus apparated her into them. "I never would have thought that this was your taste."

Regulus laughed. "It's not." He opened a door leading off the red velvet decorated room, and he raised his voice as he disappeared into his bedroom closet. "Thomas did this to it after I pissed him off a few months ago, and I haven't yet managed to change it back."

"But it looks like a..." Cammie's voice trailed off, her face turning red.

Regulus returned with two black cloaks, and passed one to Cammie. "A bordello. I know."

"What did you do?" Cammie couldn't help but ask.

"Slept with his secretary in her office." Regulus affixed the cloak he'd got for her around her neck when Cammie struggled with the ornate fastening. "Unfortunately I didn't bank on her being so upset about my not contacting her again, that she quit, and refused to return. Thomas said she was the best Muggle secretary he'd ever had."

"I still don't get it." Cammie didn't see the connection.

"He said that if I was going to use women like that, then I should stick to witches who did that sort of thing for a living, and that I should have somewhere I could bring them; not that I could really bring them here." Regulus kept his explanation as clean as he could, not wanting to embarrass Cammie. "But that still didn't stop Thomas from doing this to my sitting room. My bedroom is even worse."

Despite Regulus' efforts, Cammie still couldn't keep her face from turning even redder than it already was. "But you're married, aren't you?"

Regulus couldn't deny it. "I am but essentially my wife and I live two separate lives."

"You don't love her?" Cammie squeaked as she suddenly found herself standing in a street she'd never seen before, Regulus apparating them out before she got an answer.

"No." Regulus took her arm, leading the way out to the main thoroughfare. "As you're probably aware from Cedric, not every marriage is perfect, and mine was arranged, just as his was. And like Cedric, I never loved my wife. Therefore after Petra produced my son and a daughter, we ended that part of our relationship."

"That's sad." Cammie wondered how many others like Regulus and Cedric were unhappy in their arranged marriages.

Regulus shrugged. "It is sad about my marriage but Petra did her pureblood duty just as I did mine. And we both pursued different people after the children were born."

Cammie stared at the shops, realizing from their names that they must be somewhere in France. "Is this Paris, and does your wife act like you?"

Regulus confirmed her guess as to where they were, as well as answering the second half of the question. "It is Paris. And no, she isn't like me, Petra only has one lover. I had a mistress, as well as seeing other women."

"Had?" Cammie knew she was being nosy, even as she asked about the past tense of the word.

"Virginie and I parted ways about six months ago when she fell in love with someone else." Regulus had been upset at the time, but the speed with which he'd gotten over the news had led him to deduce that he wasn't as in love with her as he'd thought. "So my children will soon be gaining a stepfather."

Cammie's eyes widened. "You have more children?"

“Another son and a daughter.” Regulus wondered why he was even telling Cammie this, and he dropped the subject as he stopped outside of a shop. “Let’s start here.”

Cammie looked in the window, her disgusted expression revealing how she felt about Regulus' choice. “It’s a toy store.”

“I thought you might like to spend some of your money here.” Regulus could see that his choice was far from popular.

“I’m seventeen, not seven.” Cammie pointed out. “I stopped playing with toys a long time ago.”

“Sorry.” Having known her since she was fourteen, Regulus realized that he was still viewing her as a child. “Let’s go get that outfit then.”

Feeling a little rude at how she'd treated Regulus' offer, Cammie hesitated. “I know you meant well, and I want to thank you for doing this. I’m sure you probably have better things to do than babysit me.”

“As you’ve just pointed out, you’re seventeen, and not seven.” Regulus took her arm and started her walking again. “And I think that also means you’re well past needing babysitting.”

“But I’m still eating into your time.” Cammie pointed out. “You've already spent all morning with me.”

Regulus kept going past the shop he'd intended to take Cammie into to buy the outfit she wanted. It was the one he usually went to when he'd accompanied Virginie to buy his youngest daughter's clothes, but after Cammie's reaction to the toystore and her comment about her age, Regulus realized that she'd probably be dismissive of the outfits. Only once they were past the store, did he dismiss Cammie's concerns about his time. “Don't worry about my time. Thomas has asked me to do this, and since you’re saving me from work, I’m not complaining.”

“You’re a lawyer, aren’t you?” Cammie questioned as they stopped yet again, this time in front of a door, a small sign discreetly announcing that it was a shop, something she’d never have guessed from just the door.

“Yes. I practise corporate law in both the Muggle and magical world.” Because of the two worlds that Thomas spanned, and the work that he required Regulus to do for him, Regulus had acquired a Muggle degree in the UK and was a member of the New York State Bar, in addition to his magical legal status. “After you.”

Cammie spent the next hour trying on outfit after outfit, before leaving the store empty-handed. “I thought I was going to buy a outfit.”

“You just did.” Regulus informed her as they began to walk in the direction of an apparition point. “The store is set up to choose, in this case, a dress, and shoes most suited for you. They’ll be delivered to you when they’re ready.”

“But what was wrong with the dresses I tried on?” Cammie asked.

“They just give the shop an idea of what you’re looking for at that time.” Regulus took Cammie’s arm as they reached the apparition area. “The shop then provides the Vendeuse with the necessary information.”

“But I haven’t paid for anything.” Cammie pointed out as they arrived in yet another street. “And where are we going?”

“The shop bills directly.” Regulus began to steer them in the direction of the Eiffel Tower. “And we’re going there.”

“I told Uncle Thomas I’d paid for my own outfit.” Cammie snapped, a little annoyed.

“He won’t be paying for it. I will.” Regulus ushered Cammie forward.

“How much was it?” Cammie stopped.

“Two hundred galleons.” Regulus lied, aware that the shoes alone had cost considerably more than Cammie had in the bag.

Cammie tapped her purse, and handed the smaller bag that split off from it to Regulus. “Thank you, but I can buy my own clothes.”

“I didn’t mean to offend you.” Regulus took the purse and slipped it into his cloak. “But I don’t need the bonus Thomas gave me. While I’m nowhere near in his league monetary speaking, I earn enough that two hundred galleons is nothing.”

“That’s not the point.” Cammie’s face was red.

“I just wanted to buy you something for doing so well. That’s all.” Regulus apologized, as his only intention had been to reward Cammie in the same way he would his own children for something they’d done well. “Look, I really didn’t mean to upset you. Can we forget about it?”

Not wanting to appear churlish, and realizing that Regulus genuinely hadn’t intended anything by it, Cammie held out her hand to shake his. “We can.”

Regulus took her hand and kissed her knuckles rather than shaking it as she expected. “Now that we’ve dealt with that, I’d like to buy you lunch. And before you start shouting at me again, I’m buying it you as a friend.”

“You consider me a friend?” Cammie was a little staggered at Regulus’ intimation.

“After spending so much time with you, I’d like to.” Regulus began walking again. “While I can say that Thomas is my friend, there’s no one else in the Circle I consider that way.” Regulus got along with Rupert and Lucius, but he didn’t trust either man, and he loathed Lily.

“But I’m not in the Circle.” Cammie observed.

“You will be.” Regulus rightly stated, aware it would benefit him to cultivate Cammie's friendship. “So are we friends?”

“We are.” Cammie decided, delighted to have made another friend in addition to Cedric.

23rd December 2007

Cammie nervously brushed down the black velvet of her dress as she listened to the conversation flowing around her. Even though she knew all of the Inner Circle as well as the apprentices, it seemed different to be eating a meal like this with them. Cammie was just glad that Lily had baulked at coming, her dislike of Cammie still as strong as ever. Thomas could see his niece was nervous, and he spoke quietly to her. “Relax, Cammie.”

“May I have some wine?” Cammie decided to resort to alcohol.

Thomas poured her a glass of champagne. “By the way, that dress looks becoming on you.”

Narcissa overheard the remark. “It’s from La Femme, isn’t it?”

Cammie nodded. “I bought it the last time I was in Paris.”

Harry’s upper lip curled up. “Paris?”

“Yes, Paris.” Cammie’s tone was as cold as Harry’s when she responded to his question.

Lucius grinned. “Speaking of La Femme and Paris, I hear you’ve got yourself a replacement for Virginie, Regulus.”

Regulus stopped eating. “I beg your pardon.”

Narcissa enlightened Regulus about the source of her husband's comment. “Madam La Vierge mentioned that you bought several dresses for an attractive young woman a few days ago.”

“I hate to burst your bubble, Narcissa.” Regulus didn’t look at Cammie as he spoke. “But she was the ward of a close friend, and a little unseasoned for my tastes.”

Thomas smirked, knowing exactly who Regulus had accompanied. “He’s quite right, Narcissa. Regulus prefers his female companions to be a little less virtuous than the girl he was with. I should know; he’s worked his way through enough of my staff.”

Rupert noted that Cammie’s face was burning. “I think that a change of topic might be a good idea.”

Thomas apologized. “Sorry, Cammie. I sometimes forget you’re still only seventeen.”

“Despite her age, I’d have thought Camille more than versed in the ways of the world.” Harry couldn’t resist taking a shot at Cammie.

Cedric, Regulus and Thomas all displayed looks of anger as Rupert again stepped in. “I think that was uncalled for, Potter.”

Thomas, whose eyes had narrowed as Cammie’s face had tightened as Harry’s barb hit home, spoke up when Rupert finished. “If you can’t be polite to my niece, Potter. Then I suggest you leave.”

Harry put down his napkin. “Enjoy the rest of your meal.”

As Harry reached the door, Thomas called out. “And Potter?”

Harry knew he was in deep shit for his comment but he hadn’t wanted to attend the dinner, let alone have to sit opposite his former girlfriend and her current partner. “Yes, Thomas?”

“Make sure you’re in the dueling room on Monday morning at eight.” Thomas then turned his attention back to the table.

Cedric spoke softly to Cammie, slipping his hand into hers. “Potter still has a thing for you.”

Cammie thought Cedric was wrong. "No, he doesn't. He really does hate me. But as usual, I really don't want to talk about him."

After dinner ended, and the men left, Narcissa addressed Cammie. "You're rather popular."

"Sorry?" Cammie didn't quite catch Narcissa's drift.

"While Potter obviously dislikes you, you had enough men leaping to your defense." Narcissa explained her comment. "Even though they said nothing, I saw the looks on Regulus' and Cedric's faces."

"I wouldn't exactly say I was popular." Cammie responded. "Uncle Thomas is going to defend me because I'm his niece; Regulus and Cedric are my friends, and Rupert has old-fashioned manners." Cammie had been more than disturbed when she'd discovered the man she'd thought was Bill Weasley was none other than Remus' brother.

"Still, it's nice to be liked." Narcissa looked at Cammie's dress again. "That dress really is exquisite. I can't wear that shade of black but with your coloring it really is, as Thomas put it, quite becoming."

"Thank you." Despite her reservations, Cammie discovered that she quite liked Narcissa. "I found it really strange when Regulus first explained about how the store worked."

Narcissa smiled knowingly. "So you're the mysterious ward. No wonder Thomas wasn't convinced it was Regulus' new mistress."

Cammie's face burned again. "He's just my friend."

"Knowing Regulus as I do, I don't doubt it." Narcissa could see Ginny looking at Cammie's dress enviously. "Your dress is lovely as well."

"Thank you." Ginny didn't really believe Narcissa though. "But it's not in the class that both of your dresses are. Blaise would never let me spend thousands of galleons on one dress."

“Thousands of galleons?” Cammie repeated. “But this dress didn’t cost that much.”

“No doubt Madam La Vierge gave Cammie a discount because of Regulus' presence.” Narcissa remarked to Ginny as she saw the surprised look on Cammie’s face. “She’ll do that for her better customers.”

“And that wouldn’t be me.” Ginny sighed. “Have you bought any more dresses from there?”

“I bought five a few days ago.” Cammie answered automatically, her mind racing.

“Your Uncle must give you an excellent dress allowance.” Ginny sighed again. “I suppose I shouldn’t complain though. Before I married Blaise I’d have been lucky to be able to spend fifty galleons on a dress let alone the five hundred galleons this one cost.”

As the conversation turned to other things, Cammie quietly fumed until the night ended, and she was finally alone with her Uncle. “Uncle Thomas, I can’t accept the dresses you keep buying me.”

“I’m sorry?” Thomas was totally lost by Cammie’s remark.

“I don’t know how much the dresses cost, but I’m not stupid enough to believe that my allowance would stretch to them, especially as I know that they didn’t cost two hundred galleons each, as you got Regulus to tell me they did.” Cammie stood with her arms folded across her chest.

“Two hundred galleons?” Thomas almost choked on his scotch. “Regulus told you a dress from La Femme cost two hundred galleons?”

“Yes.” Cammie confirmed, before she asked a hesitant question. “Narcissa said that this one was worth several thousand galleons. Was she right?”

“It would depend on the style of dress.” Thomas assessed the one his niece was currently wearing. “That one would probably be closer to the region of three or four thousand galleons, not two.”

It was now Cammie’s turn to choke, even more horrified than when she’d first heard Narcissa’s estimation. “You’re joking?”

Thomas shook his head, having recently bought Mione something very similar. “No. But I don’t see why you’re so upset. It’s just money.”

“Money I don’t have.” Cammie could see Thomas didn’t get it. “Can I speak frankly?”

“Go ahead.” Thomas had agreed to let Cammie do so every time she had something to get off her chest, without her being afraid that Harry would punish her.

“While I appreciate the allowance you give me, I only take it because I have little choice.” Cammie met her Uncle’s eyes. “And I hated having to accept the apartment, but I didn’t want to live here, and I had nowhere else to go because of what you did.”

“What’s your point, Cammie?” Thomas asked gently.

Cammie got to it. “You can’t buy my affection back.”

“I haven’t tried to.” Thomas put down his glass of scotch. “You refused my offer of the card when I tried to give it to you, and I accepted that.”

“Then who’s been paying...” Cammie’s voice faltered when she honed in on the only person who could have bought the dresses. “I’m going to kill him.”

Thomas decided that this time Cammie would be more than capable of fighting her own battle. “He’s staying over in his rooms.”

Cammie headed towards the door before hesitating. "I apologize for jumping to the wrong conclusion."

"If I thought I could buy your affection back with dresses, then I'd have done it." Thomas admitted. "Merry Christmas, Cammie."

Cammie didn't get a chance to respond as Thomas vanished, wanting to get home to his wife.

Regulus opened the door at the loud and insistent knocking. "Does Dominus want me?"

Cammie pushed past him. "No. I do."

Regulus closed the door and pulled off the mask he'd hastily slipped on. "What's wrong?"

Cammie ripped off her own mask. "You lied to me about the price of the dresses, Regulus. Why?"

"Who told you?" Regulus walked over to the drinks cabinet and poured himself a drink.

"Narcissa, and Uncle Thomas." Cammie snapped. "Well?"

"You earned it." Regulus responded.

He realized it was the wrong answer when Cammie let rip. "Earned it? Earned it? I'm not a woman who frequents a place like this." Cammie's hands flew up into the air as she indicated the still red velvet decorated room. "You heard what Lucius said. He thought I was your bloody mistress, and now I know how much these dresses were, I'm not surprised."

"Cammie, tell me. How do you think Narcissa would have reacted if you'd turned up wearing a dress that didn't even come up to Ginny Zabini's standards?" Regulus asked, going on the defensive.

“She’d have been polite but looked down her nose at me.” While Cammie had decided she’d like Narcissa, she wasn’t stupid enough to ignore the truth about the woman’s snobbery.

“You’re my friend and Thomas’ niece, and I didn’t want to expose you to Narcissa’s disdain.” Regulus handed Cammie the glass of wine he’d poured for her. “And you’d already made it clear that you didn’t want anything from Thomas, so I thought I’d help.”

“But you bought me six dresses, Regulus.” Cammie pointed out.

“I could hardly tell you the truth after lying the first time.” Regulus explained why he’d bought her so many.

“I’ll ask Uncle Thomas to pay you back.” Cammie hated that she’d have to turn to Thomas but she felt as though she didn’t have much choice.

“Cammie, the money is nothing to me.” Regulus disparaged her offer knowing what it would cost the young woman to go to her Uncle. “I’ve already said I’m pretty well off, so let’s just forget about it.”

“And you’ve already said you’re not in Uncle Thomas’ league monetary speaking.” Cammie reminded him of the first conversation they’d had about money. “I’ll ask Uncle Thomas for the money.”

“Cammie, between what your Uncle pays me, my job, and my trust funds, I make over seven hundred thousand galleons a year.” Regulus revealed. “So the cost of the dresses is nothing. Look, if it bothers you that much, I promise not to buy you any more if you accept them as a Christmas present.”

“You’ve already given me earrings.” Cammie was wearing the diamond earrings Regulus had bought her, as well as the gold necklace and bracelet that Cedric had given her, as they’d both insisted she open her gifts that night. Thomas had bought her some items for her apartment that he’d known she needed.

“Please.” Regulus pleaded. “As I’ve already said, I don’t have that many friends.”

Cammie broke in. “Liar.”

“I have a lot of people I call friends but they’re not really people I consider true friends, unlike you and Thomas.” Regulus countered, the acquaintance that he’d decided to foster with Cammie as a benefit to himself, quickly turning into a true friendship. “ So, please accept them, I don’t want to fuck up our friendship over a few measly galleons.”

Under the weight of his pleading face, Cammie folded. “But no more. And no more Christmas presents either.”

Regulus agreed. “Okay.” He lifted his left arm. “By the way, thank you for the cufflinks. I noticed Cedric and Thomas both wearing something similar.”

“That’s because I bought the same gift for all three of you; they’re just inset with different stones.” Cammie admitted.

“Given how you feel about Thomas, I’m surprised you bought him anything.” The crisis averted, Regulus sat down beside Cammie. “And don’t worry, whatever you say stays between us.” After spending so much time together after Regulus had become solely responsible for Cammie’s training, and discovering that he truly liked the young woman, Regulus had recognized that Cammie needed someone to confide in, and he’d sworn a very painful oath when offering to act as her confidante a few days earlier.

“ You’d be dead if you told anyone.” Cammie retorted, before opening up. “It’s hard to explain. I hate Uncle Thomas for doing this to me but he was the first adult to really listen to what I had to say without treating me like a kid. I hate to say it but Dad was probably the worst offender. And if it wasn’t for Uncle Thomas, I’d have still been a terrified Hufflepuff at Hogwarts. Instead, albeit briefly, I had a wonderful time at Berowra. It helped build my confidence, something Hogwarts had managed to destroy.”

“On the other hand, that confidence led to you being here.” Regulus remarked. “You’d have never stood up to Thomas the night you rescued Sebastian without it.”

“Perhaps I shouldn’t be grateful then.” Cammie took a sip of her wine. “This is so bizarre.”

“In what way?” Regulus grabbed the bottle and poured some more wine into Cammie’s glass.

“If anyone had told me two years ago that I’d be a Death Eater, and sitting drinking wine with Dominus’ right-hand man, who just happens to be my friend and Sirius’ brother, I’d have laughed at them.” Cammie smiled wryly. “Hell, if anyone had told me that my only friends would ever be destined to be Death Eaters, I’d have laughed at that as well.” Her face fell. “I seem to have a knack for it. I just hope that you and Ced don’t change your mind about me.”

“You’re talking about Potter, aren’t you?” Regulus asked.

Cammie nodded. “I thought I’d gotten past the stage where he could still hurt me, but his comment today made me realize he can.”

“Are you still in love with him?” Regulus asked gently.

Cammie immediately shook her head. “No; my affections lie elsewhere now. But I’m well aware that he’s only here because of what I did.”

“You didn’t have any choice.” Regulus had listened to Cammie blaming herself about Harry on more than one occasion. “And if Potter truly loved you, he would have stood by you, no matter what you’d done.”

“But he didn’t.” Cammie started to cry. “I’m sorry.”

“There, there.” Regulus put down his drink and proceeded to try and comfort Cammie, awkwardly patting her on the back. “You’re going to get over him eventually.”

“I hate him, Teach.” Cammie reverted to the nickname she’d once christened Regulus with, and still occasionally used.

“So do you want me to kill him on Monday?” Regulus asked.

Cammie sat up straight. “You?”

“Thomas asked me to deal with him.” Regulus revealed one of the things that the men had discussed after dinner. “And given how much he’s upset you, I’m going to enjoy it. Cedric feels the same way as well.”

“Please don’t hurt him too badly.” Cammie wasn’t surprised that Cedric felt that way, but she was a little shocked to discover that Regulus also didn’t seem to like Harry.

“I’ll tone it down.” Regulus offered. “Not that the little shit deserves it.”

“Thank you.” Cammie wiped her eyes. “I’d best get to bed.”

“I’ll see you in the dueling room on Monday afternoon.” Regulus got up and handed her mask. “Goodnight, Cammie, and don’t let that prat’s comments get to you.”

“I won’t.” Cammie kissed Regulus’ cheek. “Thanks again for the dresses.”

“You’re welcome.” Regulus stood out of sight as he opened the door, his face set as he closed it again. “I wonder if I should have explained that by toning it down, I meant I wouldn’t kill him.” Not trusting or liking Harry as Cammie had just found out, and feeling as protective of the young girl as he would his own daughters, Regulus smiled to himself. “Definitely not.”

Grinning, he spelled off the lights and went into his bedroom.

5th April 2008

Cammie holstered her wand. "I almost had you that time."

"Almost isn't good enough." Regulus grinned. "But it was a good effort."

"So what are you doing tonight?" Cammie asked as she picked up her mask.

"Nothing." Regulus grabbed his own mask.

"But it's your birthday." Cammie protested. "I know you and Petra aren't exactly the best of friends, but still."

"It's no big deal." Regulus got ready to apparate. "I'm a little too old to get that upset over birthdays."

"Isn't Uncle Thomas doing anything for you?" Cammie grabbed the towel she'd been using to wipe away the sweat from her face and neck.

"He's in Paris with Mione." Regulus explained. "So I'm on my own."

"Then come to my apartment when you've showered." Cammie offered. "You can't spend the rest of your birthday on your own." She then vanished, leaving Regulus to head off to his rooms at Castrum House.

When Regulus appeared in the tiny hallway of Cammie's apartment, he called out. "Cammie?"

"I'm in the kitchen." Cammie yelled back. "Come in."

Regulus headed into the kitchen to find a bottle of champagne chilling, and some chocolate dipped strawberries sitting on a platter. "Are you trying to seduce me, Miss Sebastian?"

Cammie's face turned fiery red, and angry. "Hardly. I thought it might be nice if I did something for your birthday seeing as no-one else has, but you can leave if you prefer."

Regulus could see he'd offended her with his joking comment. "I'm sorry, Cammie. I was only teasing you. And I appreciate that you've taken the time to do this."

Mollified, Cammie handed him a glass of champagne. "Happy Birthday, Regulus."

"Thank you." Regulus took one of the strawberries as Cammie put down her own glass, and crossed the room.

Going over to the dresser on the far side of the room, Cammie took a small gift wrapped package off the cupboard. "Happy Birthday."

"You didn't just go and buy this, did you?" Regulus knew she wouldn't have had time to.

"No." Cammie had bought it a few days earlier. "I forgot to bring it to the dueling room, so I was going to drop it into your rooms after I'd eaten."

Regulus unwrapped the gift to find a Muggle style wristwatch but unlike Muggle watches this one was magically driven. "Cammie, you really shouldn't have spent this much money on me." Regulus was only too well aware of how much the exclusive watch would have cost.

"Then we're even." Cammie was aware he'd know she was referring to the dresses he'd bought her. "I'm more bothered about whether you like it. Uncle Thomas said you can get it changed if you don't like the model."

Regulus was touched that Cammie had gone to so much trouble. "And did Uncle Thomas tell you I ruined my last watch dueling with him?"

"Yes." Cammie had swallowed her pride and gone to her Uncle to find the perfect present for Regulus after wracking her brain for weeks. Unlike Cedric, who liked anything to do with quidditch and history, and who'd been delighted with the antique Oakshaft 79 broomstick she'd tracked down for him, Regulus was a tougher call. "As it happened only a week ago, I hoped you hadn't replaced it yet."

"I haven't." Regulus hadn't had time. He took the watch out of the box and affixed it to his wrist. "As I know you'd have had to have asked Thomas to increase your allowance to buy this, it means a lot to me."

"I did the same for Ced, and like him I consider you my best friend now." Cammie had long removed that tag when she thought about Harry. "So it wasn't too much of a sacrifice. Uncle Thomas was quite delighted to be truthful."

Regulus knew that Thomas still hoped that he and Cammie could patch it up even after this long. After glancing at the watch, he realized how late it was, and, as his stomach rumbled, he made an offer, not wanting to spend the rest of his birthday alone. "Would you like to have dinner with me?"

"As long we don't have to eat here. All I've got in is half a loaf of bread, and the chocolate strawberries that you're eating." Cedric had bought them for Cammie for Easter, forgetting she was allergic to strawberries.

"How does New York sound?" Regulus decided to floo Thomas to let him know he was making the trip. "I have some papers I need to pick up, so it would kill two birds with one stone."

"Really?" Cammie couldn't hide her delight as the furthest she now ever went was in Europe.

"Pack an overnight bag." Regulus suggested. "The portkey trip back tonight would be too much."

Thomas had long ago agreed to allow Cammie to travel where she chose, aware that Cammie wouldn't attempt to flee, because as she'd previously pointed out, she had nowhere to flee to anyway, and she wouldn't allow others to suffer for her. "Okay then." Cammie headed into her bedroom.

Regulus then left to pick up his own bag and the international portkey he held, before apparating back to Cammie's apartment. "I see you're ready."

Cammie nodded eagerly. "Aunt Cassandra loves New York and I can't wait to see it." Cammie's face fell a little as she thought about her aunt.

Regulus hesitated. "On second thoughts, maybe New York isn't such a good idea. I'd hate to be unlucky enough to run into my niece and her husband."

Cammie hadn't thought of that. "How about Paris instead?"

"I've got a better idea." Regulus pulled out the portkey and tapped it. "Portus Amendo Boston USA. I can then apparate to the New York office to pick up my papers after dinner."

Cammie was just as thrilled at the idea of Boston, and when the portkey deposited them at the end of the journey, she looked round in amazement at the beautifully decorated hotel lobby. "Why didn't we just go to dinner in Paris?"

"Thomas is taking Mione there tonight, and I didn't want to run into them either." Regulus headed for the registration desk. "May I book two rooms for one night?"

Cammie tugged Regulus to the side. "I should pay for this."

"No, you shouldn't." Regulus knew that Cammie couldn't really afford it.

So Cammie politely stepped to one side as Regulus completed the details. When he'd finished she wagged a finger at him. "This is supposed to be your birthday."

"It is my birthday, and as such I can treat a friend if I want to." Regulus headed for the elevator. "Do you think that Cedric will be upset when he finds out that I stole his girlfriend for the night?"

Cammie shook her head. "He's spending tonight with Cho, so he won't miss me."

"But I'm sure he'd rather he was spending it with you." Regulus was well aware of Cedric's feelings for Cammie.

"Probably, but he has to see his wife sometimes." Cammie remarked wryly as the door closed on them.

The Next Evening

Cedric sat on the sofa with Cammie. "I hear from Thomas that you went to Boston with Regulus."

Cammie's face lit up. "You heard right. We went out to dinner to celebrate his birthday, and then we strolled along the waterfront before returning to the hotel."

"Did you sleep with him?" Cedric asked in an uptight voice.

Cammie's happy face changed, turning cold. "No. After taking me back to the hotel, Regulus then left to go to the New York office." Cammie got to her feet. "I think you should go."

Cedric knew he'd screwed up. "Look, Cammie, I'm sorry but when Thomas told me you'd gone with Regulus, given how much time the two of you spend together, I just jumped to the wrong conclusion."

"He spends so much time with me because he's taken Potter's place, or do you think I was sleeping with him again as well?" Cammie wasn't appeased by Cedric's apology.

"Of course not. And I really am sorry." Cedric apologized again as he took Cammie's hand. "Let me make it up to you by taking you out to dinner now."

"Cho isn't expecting you?" Cammie's voice was still cold.

"She's otherwise engaged." Cedric kissed Cammie's hand. "Come on, I'll take you out to a restaurant I know that's really discreet."

"Let me get my cloak." Cammie entered the bedroom, still annoyed with Cedric but not one to turn down dinner.

Cedric put his arms around Cammie as she returned to the room. "On second thoughts, how about we stay in instead?"

"I'm hungry." Cammie wasn't going to let Cedric get away with not taking her to dinner as he'd promised. She knew that if they stayed in, he'd attempt to get her to sleep with him, and despite their shared kisses and cuddling up until then, she still couldn't bring herself to take that final step.

Cedric reluctantly let go of her. "Then Bodega it is."

The two of them apparated to the restaurant, only to get halfway through the meal when Cammie spotted Harry Potter sitting down on the other side of the room with Cedric's wife. "Ced, your wife is over there."

Cedric glanced over in alarm. "Cammie, I've got to go." With that, Cedric got up and literally ran out of the restaurant.

Cammie sighed heavily. "Stuff it, I'm finishing my dinner."

Harry noticed Cammie a few minutes later, and after saying a few words to Cho, he got up and sauntered over to her table. "Miss Sebastian, frightened off your dinner partner did you?"

Cammie realized that while Harry might have noticed the half-eaten meal, he obviously hadn't spotted that she'd been eating with Cedric. "He had to leave, not that it's any of your business." She glanced over at Cho. "Is she your latest?"

"Jealous?" Harry could hear the dislike in Cammie's voice.

"In your dreams, Potter." Cammie looked down at her meal before glancing up again to meet Harry's mocking stare. "And now I'd for you to leave me alone. You're curdling my cream sauce."

"I'm sure it was already that way." Harry turned away before firing off one last parting shot. "I know I'd curdle if I had to sit on a plate in front of a bitch like you. Enjoy the rest of your meal."

Cammie's appetite disappeared, and as Harry walked away, she called for the check.

Next Chapter: Cammie is finally deemed ready; Harry Potter learns the truth about Cammie; H.J. discovers a secret his brother and Sirius have been keeping from him.

Chapter 63: First Kill

20th November 2008

Harry Potter kissed his way down the woman's olive skinned back. "You really do have the softest skin."

"Did you tell her the same?" The dark-haired woman asked.

Harry stopped what he was doing. "Who?"

"Sebastian." The woman clarified.

Harry scowled and turned the woman over so that he could look at her. "It's none of your fucking business. I don't ask what you and Cedric do in the bedroom."

"He barely touches me." The woman responded. "And he's unlikely to given that he's fucking Sebastian." Cho had found out about Cammie and Cedric after having been promoted to an apprentice after displaying an exceptional talent for spells involving charms when she fought; Thomas having decided to foster her talent under Lily's tutelage.

Harry stared into the woman's dark eyes. "Look, you made it completely clear that you wanted sex, and I'm happy to oblige. But I don't want to talk about Camille or Cedric, and what they do when they're together. So if we're going to fuck, then let's fuck."

The woman didn't even bat an eyelid at Harry's crudity. "I just wondered that's all."

"Well you can stop wondering." Harry parted her legs with his hand. "And get on with what you came here to do."

The woman shut up as Harry slid into her, his mouth covering hers.

Several hours later Harry Sebastian's eyes narrowed as the dark-haired woman came swaying down the stairs. The woman smiled at him. "Auror Sebastian, what brings you here?"

"Dinner with my brother." Harry refrained from adding, 'not that it's any of your business. "You, Mrs. Diggory?" Harry emphasized the 'Mrs'."

Cho ignored it, and smiled lazily. "Lunch with Harry." Lunch, however, had been over hours earlier.

"I do hope you had a nice one." Harry kept his tone polite but he knew from her scent what she'd been doing.

"It was very relaxing." Cho smirked. "Enjoy your dinner, Auror Sebastian."

"Mrs. Diggory." Harry inclined his head. Once she'd left, he headed upstairs and knocked on Harry's door, entering when Harry called out. "I've just passed your latest, Harry. I thought you had better taste."

"I don't see the problem." Harry Potter pulled on a white shirt. "I'm single and Cho has a mind of her own."

"Is she a Death Eater, Harry?" Harry asked the young man.

"I can't answer that." The young man picked up his cloak. "And I have to go."

Harry stopped him. "Harry, you're becoming the man I once was. And I know from experience that sleeping with woman after woman isn't going to take the pain away."

Harry Potter's face tightened. "You said yourself that this world parallels your own, so perhaps this is how it's supposed to be. While Camille might not be dead as Mione was, she might as well be."

"But you do still love her, don't you?" Harry asked gently, easily able to discern Harry's feelings as he mentioned Cammie.

“Yes.” Harry admitted, giving a bitter laugh. “The bitch ripped out my heart and, even though I’ve tried again and again to convince myself I hate her, I still can’t forget her. Stupid isn’t it?”

“No, it’s not.” Harry felt horribly sorry for the young man. “But if my hypothesis about things happening in my world also happening here are correct, then you too will eventually get over her, and find someone you truly care about.”

“Not everything is the same.” Harry Potter picked up his red mask. “And I really do have to go.”

“You have a meeting?” Harry enquired.

“Yes but I don’t know why.” Harry placed his mask on his face, hiding both his features and his emotions.

“Be careful.” Harry warned.

“I always am, boss. I always am.” With that Harry Potter vanished.

Harry stared at the empty space. Once they’d found out from Harry Potter that he’d been forced to return as a Death Eater, he and Sirius had recruited Harry as an Unspeakable, bypassing usual protocols as the Potter heir was the only friendly contact they had in Dominus’ camp, and they both intended to make use of it. Shaking his head, Harry opened the door and went downstairs to join his brother.

13th February 2009

Harry Potter walked into the gardens at Castrum House, his newly changed mask adorning his face, still reeling that Thomas had promoted him to the Inner Circle. Wanting to clear his head, and even though it was a little chilly outside, Harry had decided to go and sit on the bench that was furthest from the house, but he’d barely taken two steps out of the door when voices drifted over to him.

"I'm sorry but he's refused to back down this time." A deep rumbling voice reached Harry's ears. "You've been capable of carrying out a first kill for months now; it's only your status as his niece that's kept him from forcing you from having to do it thus far."

"Did you tell him that I wasn't ready yet?" Harry knew that the speaker had to be Cammie.

The man's rumbling voice came back. "It doesn't matter what I think; he believes you're ready."

A panicked response was elicited by the statement "But I'm not. I can't do it."

The owner of the male voice responded. "You have to, and you are capable. If you don't do it, he will punish you."

"I'd rather he do that than take a life." Cammie's voice was determined. "It would destroy me. I can still remember how Amo reacted and looked after his first kill, and like him, I don't want it."

The man snorted. "He's hardly got a problem with killing now, though, has he? He almost seemed to enjoy taking that man's life yesterday."

Harry couldn't deny how his actions must have appeared to others. At Thomas' request, Harry had dragged every last ounce of pain he could from the Death Eater who'd betrayed Thomas, before killing him.

"If he's become like that then it's because of me; because I caved into Dominus' demands." Cammie's voice was filled with regret.

When the man responded, Harry wondered who he was; the mask meaning that you couldn't determine who was beneath it from just the voice alone. "It's not your fault; you had no choice except to agree to be his apprentice. Dominus would have killed your father if you'd refused to go along with his wishes."

Hearing that Cammie hadn't really betrayed him as he'd believed hit Harry like a thunderbolt, and he stood stunned on the pathway as Cammie's response floated back to him. "But it is my fault. If I hadn't have been so stupid as to think I could help my family by turning back to the Dark Arts, then none of this would have happened."

"You can't change the past." Harry himself had been told the same thing time and time again by both James and Severus. "You can only move on."

"But it's hard." Cammie's voice was now edged with tears. "If I hadn't lied to Amo about what I was doing and I'd turned to my Aunt instead of to Dominus, then none of this would have happened to us. I'd still be with my family and friends, and not living a life I don't want."

"I don't regret you did it, Mortifer." Harry realized that even though the couple believed they weren't being listened to, they were still taking the precaution of not using real names. "I wouldn't have you in my life now if you hadn't turned to him." Harry could hear worry as the man continued. "Do you still wish you were with Amo?"

"No! I want to be with you." Cammie's denial was swift. "And while I still feel some guilt for what happened to Amo, I'm also aware that he could have gone to my Uncle, and he'd have helped him again; I didn't have the luxury of that choice with everyone believing that I'd betrayed them. I had a hard enough time convincing my Uncle that I hadn't done anything wrong on the first occasion I went to him. Knowing how he feels about me now, this time I'd have ended up in a prison cell."

Harry had turned to Harry Sebastian, but the outcome hadn't been quite the one he'd planned on. Lost in his thoughts, Harry suddenly realized that the man had started speaking again, Harry missing the first part. "...trusted you. I would have known you couldn't have stood by and let that happen to someone you loved. And you did love him, didn't you?"

"You know I did but my love for him began to die when he gave me this." Harry knew without being able to see her, that Cammie was

referring to the Dark Mark on her wrist. "I know he said that he hated me, but I didn't want to believe him, but when he gave me this, it just proved that he'd been telling the truth about his feelings." Harry listened carefully as a pause ensued before Cammie started up again. "I'm sorry. You must have heard me say this a thousand times. It's about time I put my past firmly where it belongs, in the past." Harry imagined Cammie's straightening her back as she continued. "I have to accept that my family and friends are lost to me, and as terrible as it is, Amo has made his own choice."

"So are you ready to move into the house I bought you?" Harry felt as though someone had punched him in the gut as the man made the request.

"I don't know." Cammie's voice reflected her lingering reluctance. "I'm afraid of what people, and especially your wife, will say if they find out, and I'm not entirely sure I'm ready for the world to know that I'm your mistress."

Harry knew then who the mystery man was; Cedric Diggory. Harry had caught Cedric and Cammie kissing just before he'd started seeing Cho in April. Harry wondered if Cammie was aware that Cho already knew about her and Cedric, as Cho often complained about how much time Cedric spent with Cammie, and the fact he was sleeping with her, even though Cho herself was sleeping with Harry. With hindsight Harry admitted to himself that he'd only started sleeping with Cho as a way of hitting back at Cedric. Cedric started speaking again, interrupting Harry's reverie. "I'm sorry I can't offer you marriage. I wish I could but I want you to know that I don't consider you my mistress. I consider you the woman I love, and I have something for you."

Harry could hear the soft rustling of cloth, and then a tiny clicking sound, before Cammie gasped. "I can't accept it. It should go to your wife. She..."

Cedric interrupted her. "My wife has enough. This belonged to my great grandmother and she wanted me to give it to the woman I loved.

It was actually my great grandmother's lover, and not her husband, who gave the ring to her."

"Was she happy with her lover?" Harry wanted to walk away but couldn't as Cammie asked a question.

"Very much." Cedric's voice had now softened. "I'd like to think she was as happy as I am with you. Like me, she had no choice about who she married, and like me she also found true love with someone she subsequently spent most of her life with. So will you wear it?"

Cammie then dealt Harry's already battered heart a final blow as she responded to Cedric. "I will."

Unable to bear it any longer, Harry finally turned on his heel and left.

Grimmauld Square

H.J., Sirius and Harry heard the crack as Harry Potter returned home, before the sound of the study door opening reached them and then the distinctive sound of glass chinking against glass. Harry Sebastian got to his feet. "I can feel his despair from here." Another crack signaled that Harry Potter had left the study. Harry Sebastian glanced upstairs. "I'd best go talk to him."

"I'll come with you." H.J., together with Sirius, apparated up with Harry, knocking on the young man's door. "Harry, can we come in?"

Getting no answer, H.J. tried the door to find it warded and locked. Unfortunately for Harry Potter, with H.J. and Harry both having Potter blood and both considered head of the Potter household courtesy of their own world, they could both override any wards on the property. H.J. did so now. Opening the door he found that Harry Potter was sitting on the bed, a large glass of brandy in his hand. "Harry?"

He looked around at the three men. "I failed her. I should have trusted her, and I didn't. And now I've lost her forever."

Given his conversation with Harry a few months earlier, Harry Sebastian took a guess about who the young man was talking about. "How did you fail Cammie?"

"I didn't trust her." Harry took a large mouthful of brandy. "I didn't trust her."

Sirius could see he was in shock. "Harry, can you tell us what happened?"

"I needed some fresh air so I stepped into the gardens. I heard Cammie's voice coming from the side of the house." Harry Potter began.

H.J. interrupted him. "She didn't see you?"

Harry shook his head. "I was standing by the back entrance, and she was around the corner by the far bench."

H.J. frowned, knowing the layout of Castrum House well from Cammie's memories of her time there. "That's impossible. There's no way you'd be able to hear her from there."

Sirius nodded at his godson. "Tell him."

"I'm a werewolf." Harry Potter took a deep draught of the brandy.

"How?" H.J. was shocked.

"I did it to him." His brother admitted.

"What?" H.J. was now even more stunned.

Harry Sebastian explained. "Harry here came to Sirius and myself for help to remove his Mark again. Instead we asked him to remain with Thomas and spy for us. However, he refused to do so unless I bit him."

“But why?” H.J. couldn't understand why anyone would make such a sacrifice.

“I can't relay any direct conversations when I'm in Dominus' presence.” Harry was now beginning to calm down. “But I can pass on overheard conversations between other people. Since I can't go around casting listening spells all the time without taking the chance of being caught, I knew I needed something else to gain an advantage, so I bargained with Uncle Sirius and Harry. I believed it was a small price to pay for what we'd gain.”

“How could you the two of you have agreed to this?” H.J. was appalled with Sirius and his brother. “Especially you, Harry. You know how terrible it is to change every month, and to inflict that on him is damned irresponsible as well as morally reprehensible.”

Harry Sebastian hadn't wanted to do it but after talking it over with Sirius, they'd both agreed to Harry Potter's terms. “Don't think I did this lightly; I didn't. But given the current state of affairs, we need him. I attend the meetings with Harry's help but only he is privy to the more important matters we need to know.”

H.J. sat down, taking the weight off his leg. “So why didn't you tell me before?”

“Because Harry is working as an Unspeakable for us.” Sirius decided he may as well be totally open with H.J. “And I ordered both of them not to tell you because of any lingering feelings you might have for Cammie.”

H.J. couldn't help but feel angry at his brother more than he was at Sirius or the Potter heir. “Lingering feelings? She's your niece as well, Harry. Don't you have any goddamn feelings about that?”

“I do, but I find it easier to set my feelings aside than you do.” Harry could still remember how badly H.J. had wanted to believe his daughter's innocence, even after what had happened to him. “You can't deny it, can you?”

"No, I can't." H.J. still loved his daughter despite what she'd become. "And if I could help her I would."

"Something else I was afraid of." Sirius more or less told H.J. that he didn't trust him as far as Cammie was concerned. "H.J., as much as I hate to say it, Cammie is a casualty of war, and she's lost to us."

"War?" H.J. echoed.

"Yes, war, H.J." His brother pointed out. "And in times of war sacrifices must be made. Even though it's only odd incidences at the moment, Dominus is eventually going to tear our world apart piece by piece, and any information we can get now is necessary, and any hindrance must be dealt with."

H.J. understood only too well from experience where Harry was coming from but he questioned what Harry had told him about Harry Potter. "Okay, so Harry is a spy and you all don't trust me. But why bother making him an Unspeakable?"

"Because it allows me to do whatever is necessary without the threat of New Azkaban hanging over my head." Harry Potter revealed the real reason why. "And given some of the terrible things I've done to regain Dominus' trust, that's exactly where I'd have ended up without the protection Uncle Sirius has provided me with."

"Does he know you're a werewolf?" H.J. questioned.

Harry Potter nodded. "Yes. Harry said it would be best to come clean about it, so I told Dominus that Harry's potion failed one night, and I was unlucky enough to be the one to suffer for it. As you can imagine, Dominus has used me on more than one full moon to do his dirty work."

H.J. was hit by a blast of shame that he'd essentially been bitching when the young man in front of him had obviously been making sacrifices no-one should have to. "I'm sorry."

Harry Sebastian steered the conversation back to where it had been. "Harry, what did you find out about Cammie that upset you so much?"

Harry explained. "She only joined Dominus to save the man she thought was me."

H.J. now felt the same desolation Harry had when he'd overheard Cammie's conversation. "Hermione was right all this time."

Sirius mulled over something was niggling at him. "Are you sure Cammie didn't know you were there?"

His godson was aware that there was no way she could have. "I'd just come out from a meeting that she wasn't part of." He swallowed, and told them about the first part of the conversation he'd overheard. "There's something else. She has to make her first kill soon. I don't know when but I do know she doesn't want to do it."

The three other men were incredulous. "She still hasn't done it?"

Harry shook his head. "No but her time is running out, and I can't do a thing to help her."

"I still have the wand Maman created." Harry Sebastian told him. "Do you think you can get it to her?"

"Given the fact that she hates my guts, she'd never take anything from me anymore." Harry also wasn't sure if he trusted Cammie not to tell Thomas, and no matter how terribly he'd previously misjudged her, he now couldn't take the risk that she wouldn't betray him this time. "To say nothing of the fact that she's pretty tight with the Inner Circle."

H.J. pleaded with the young man. "I know she's erred, but she can't have totally fallen if she hasn't taken a life yet, and doesn't want to. Please, Harry, you have to help her. I don't care how you do it but I don't want her taking a life."

Harry Potter glanced at Harry, who nodded. "Fine. Get me the wand, and I'll do what I can."

H.J. knew he'd have to be satisfied with that. "Thank you."

The Next Night

Harry grabbed his leg where Harry Potter had placed a Dark Mark that he controlled, which enabled him to contact Harry. Unfortunately Harry's remnant of a Dark Mark, while allowing him to apparate through barriers keyed to it, wasn't enough to let him know when a meeting was being held. "Ouch."

Cassandra paled. "Another meeting?"

"I'll be back as soon as I can." Harry wondered why Harry Potter hadn't told him yesterday. "Don't wait up."

"Don't be stupid." Cassandra had no intention of going to bed until she knew her husband was safe. "Be careful, Harry."

"I will." Harry accioed his mask and cloak and hurriedly vanished.

When he arrived at Castrum House, he found the ballroom filling up. It terrified Harry how many people had now turned to Dominus. He wondered what was happening and soon found out, as Dominus led the way onto the dais that was set on the far wall. A few minutes later the doors to the apparition room were closed and the doors opposite opened. Harry could do nothing as he watched a group of Muggles being dragged in.

Dominus beckoned to the red-masked apprentice Harry knew was his niece. "Choose."

Harry swallowed hard as he realized that the first kill Harry Potter had mentioned had come about sooner than he realized. He just hoped that Harry had had time to get the wand to Cammie. He was transfixed as with a steady hand and voice, Cammie pointed to the feeblest out of the bunch. "Her."

“A good choice.” Thomas had expected Cammie to go for the tall and burly man. “Whenever you’re ready.”

The Muggle was pleading. “Please don’t hurt me.”

“Avada Kedavra.” Cammie’s voice continued to be steady as she incanted the killing curse, the green light filling the room momentarily before the Muggle dropped to the ground.

The biggest Muggle struggled against his captors. “You bitch. That was my daughter.”

Thomas tutted. “You should be grateful. She has just saved your daughter from the fate that awaits her two other sisters.”

The man paled. “What do you mean?”

Thomas turned. “Simus, Argentus. Happy Valentine's Day. They're yours to do with as you please.”

Harry Sebastian frowned. He hadn’t heard the name ‘Simus’ before, and he wondered exactly who the latest Inner Circle member was, and what had happened to Amicus, who wasn’t there. Harry thoughts returned to the sacrificial Muggles as the father's language grew worse and his voice louder when Simus barked out an order. “Take that one to my rooms.” Argentus made the same request.

The man was now struggling hard but in vain. “You fucking bastards. Don’t you dare touch them.”

Screaming, the girls were dragged out. Thomas turned to Cammie again, and reinstated the name she'd once held. “Carus, I think the honor of dealing with this Muggle scum belongs to you.”

Harry again could do nothing as his niece raised her wand but instead of casting the killing curse, she cast the Cruciatus spell instead. As the man writhed on the floor, Harry knew that Harry Potter hadn’t gotten the wand to Cammie; the spell would have failed if he

had. Moments later Cammie cast her second killing curse, putting the man out of his misery.

Harry Potter felt as bad as Harry Sebastian as he watched the display. Finally he believed that despite her words about not wanting to make a first kill, Cammie was truly lost to them. Adding to his problems was the fact that he now also had a woman in his rooms to deal with. Heading up to them, he nodded at the guards who were standing outside of his rooms. "Wait here until I'm finished."

When Harry entered his bedroom, the girl was secured to his bed, weeping pitifully. Harry removed his silver mask, and cupped her face gently. "I'm so very sorry."

"Please don't hurt me." The girl managed to sob out.

"I'll make it quick." Harry pulled out his wand. "Avada Kedavra." He then inflicted cuts upon the girl, tearing her clothing away and removing her underwear. Only once he'd finished, did he then turn and head into the bathroom, vomiting until he could do so no more.

Then he closed the door to his bedroom, tears falling rapidly as he picked up the brandy he now found himself turning to more and more, and poured himself a glass. After an hour he wiped his eyes and replaced his mask. Opening the door he beckoned to the guards. "Get rid of it."

Needing to get away, he apparated home to find Harry Sebastian waiting for him, his wand drawn. "It's me, Sir."

Despite Harry's formal address and acknowledgement of him as his superior, Harry Sebastian still kept his wand outstretched. "Nice and slowly, take off the mask."

"See, it's just me." Harry removed his silver mask. "I hadn't realized you didn't spot the mask yesterday."

Harry Sebastian knew now who Simus was. "What did you do to the girl?"

"I killed her before making it look as though I'd done more." Harry's hands were shaking as he poured yet another brandy. "I didn't want to but I didn't have any choice."

Harry Sebastian placed a hand on the young man's shoulder. "I'm sorry you had to do that, and that you didn't get the wand to Cammie in time."

"I had no idea it was to be tonight." Harry was completely devastated.

"At least she didn't fall apart." Harry Sebastian commented. "And she did exactly what Dominus would have expected."

"She's been a Death Eater long enough to know how it works." Harry remarked. "And no doubt her lover coached her well."

"Her lover?" Harry Sebastian was shocked to hear that Cammie had taken a lover, but he supposed that given the amount of time that had gone by, he shouldn't have been.

"Fultus." Harry took a large mouthful of his brandy. "It was him I overheard her talking to yesterday afternoon when I got this." Harry lifted up his silver mask. "Even though he's already married, he's pledged his love to her, given her a ring, and he's going to set her up in a house."

"Merlin, I'm so sorry, Harry." Harry Sebastian could feel how hurt Harry was.

"After how I treated her, I couldn't expect her to love me again. It was only a matter of time before she moved on." Harry ran a hand over his face, wiping away the tears that were once again threatening. "She turned to him after things reached a really bad point between Cammie and me, and so he's been her friend for some time. I think she turned to him in exactly the same way as she once turned to me." Harry stared into his brandy. "I just didn't see it coming."

Harry had observed Cammie and Fultus together on more than occasions at meetings. "I've seen them touch hands occasionally, but I just assumed they were just friends."

Harry Potter knew better. "As I've been sleeping with her for some time, I'd take what his wife says that it's definitely more than just friends as correct."

Harry knew in that moment who Fultus was, and that his suspicions about Cho being a Death Eater were correct. "Cho is his wife, isn't she?"

"Yes." The young man sighed heavily. "And I can't even condemn Cammie for falling for another Death Eater, even if he is married. She has no-one else. Something that wouldn't have been the case if I'd believed in her."

"None of us did." Harry Sebastian was just as much to blame. "And even though H.J. loves his daughter, only Hermione, Luna and Xander refused to believe the truth about her, and it looks as though I'll owe them an apology once all this is over."

"I sometimes feel as if it will never be over." Harry watched in grim satisfaction as his glass refilled. "That I'll be stuck serving Dominus for all eternity."

"That's not going to happen, Harry." His boss squeezed his shoulder as he got to his feet.

"You don't know that." Harry pointed out. "When I escaped from Dominus the first time I thought it was over. Now I have a new identity, and I'm a killer. Not that tonight was the first time, and I doubt it will be the last."

"Harry, as I said earlier, this is war, and we sometimes have to do things we wouldn't normally condone." Harry's voice was gentle as he continued. "What you did for that girl was merciful in comparison to what you know Argentus was probably doing to her sister." Harry watched the younger man's face crumple, and even though he knew

he should get back and let Cassandra know he was alright, at that moment, Harry Potter needed him more.

Harry found his head being held against his boss' shoulder as he wept, giant sobs that wrenched his entire body as he held onto Harry Sebastian.

Harry held the young man until the storm had passed. "Harry, do you want to come home with me? Cass will still be up, and we can talk."

Not wanting to be alone, Harry accepted the offer and the two men vanished.

Later that night, Harry Potter lay staring at the ceiling in Harry's spare room as he thought about his life and how closely it now paralleled his counterpart's. Like Harry, he too now treated women as mere sex objects, he drank too much and, even though it had been through choice, he too was a werewolf. Harry knew that despite his avowals to his father about never marrying, something James refused to believe, James would be heartbroken to find out what Harry done, robbing himself of the chance ever to produce a male heir. His tears from earlier returned as he thought about why his life had turned out the way it had, and he turned his face into the pillow. "Oh Mie, I'm so sorry."

In her new house, having just made love, Cammie found that unlike usual, because of the night's events, she couldn't sleep. Biting her lip, she turned her face into the pillow. "Why didn't you trust me, Harry?"

Next Chapter: Tonks discovers the origin of 'FBW'; Anna Jameson comes to a somewhat contentious, but logical conclusion about Dominus' true identity; H.J. and Harry Sebastian turn against each other

Chapter 64: The Truth Is Out There

25th March 2010

Padstow Comprehensive School

Tonks called out the final name and closed the register. "Okay, from your usual teacher's notes, I believe that you're each supposed to be making a presentation to the class about your hobbies, so we'll start with Taylor Young."

Tonks had to curb her smile as Taylor had obviously expected to be last. "Taylor, come along."

One by one the class made their presentations. On the whole Tonks thought they did well, although she had spotted several pupils who really hadn't made much of an effort. She looked down at the register, which she'd reopened. "Matthew Grant."

Matthew walked to the front of the class. "My report is on the flying lessons that I'm taking."

Tonks gave a sad smile as she thought about Cammie. "Go ahead, Matthew."

She listened a little distractedly, thoughts of Cammie filling her mind, when something Matthew had said a few sentences earlier finally registered. "Matthew, could you repeat that last part?"

"Which part, Mrs. Potter?" Matthew wasn't quite sure what Tonks wanted him to repeat.

"The part when you're describing a larger plane's attributes." Tonks clarified.

"Boeing is among several companies that equip their larger aircraft with newer technology such as fly-by-wire, which is often abbreviated by pilots to FBW. Abbreviations are commonplace among the airline industry and include..." Matthew continued from the point he'd

reached when Tonks stopped him, and proceeded to finish his report, not even realizing that Tonks was no longer listening.

Tonks came back to herself as the class politely clapped. Realizing she'd been distracted, she hurriedly scribbled an 'A+' next to Matthew's name. Checking the register she called out the next name and forced herself to listen as one Claire Bartlett began her presentation on dog showing.

BritAD

Sirius got up from his desk and hugged his cousin. "Tonks, this is a surprise. I'd have thought you were teaching."

"I'm on lunch." Tonks hurriedly told him. "But I wanted to tell you about my class this morning."

A little taken aback, Sirius' face reflected his surprise. "I don't mean to be rude, Tonks, but I have a meeting in a few minutes. Can it wait for some other time?"

Tonks decided that it couldn't. "It might be nothing but I need to show you my memory of one of the pupil's presentations."

Realizing that it was obviously important, Sirius left his office, and stuck his head around Harry's office door. "Harry, can you begin the meeting without me?"

When Harry said he could, Sirius headed back into his own office. "That's sorted, now let me get my pensieve."

Tonks waited impatiently while Sirius cast several spells on the wall, before a slot slid open and he was able to retrieve the pensieve. "You certainly keep that locked up well."

"Seeing as they're supposed to be illegal, I thought it best." Sirius smiled as he placed it on his desk, and then warded his office to stop them being disturbed. "If you'd place the memory in the pensieve."

Tonks did as she was requested and then joined Sirius inside. "I almost missed this part."

Sirius listened to Matthew's speech that Tonks had deposited, and immediately spotted what had startled her. "FBW."

"As I said, it might not be important but I thought you should see it." Tonks responded.

Sirius pulled them both out of the memory. "Can I keep the memory for the moment?"

"Strangely enough it's not one of my favorites, so yes." Tonks checked the time. "I'm going to have to get going. But do you think it means anything?"

"I don't know to be truthful." Sirius replaced the pensieve back into the wall, before reversing his earlier actions, until the wall was again seamless with no visible entrance. "But it's the only lead I've got on Frank and what his cryptic comment might mean. I'll discuss it with Harry after our meeting."

"Can I drop by tonight?" Tonks wanted to know if her discovery meant anything or not.

"I'll see you at Harry's at about five." Sirius hugged Tonks again. "With Faith at the Watchers' conference, Cassie invited me to have an early dinner."

Tonks hadn't known that Faith had taken up her slayer duties again. "So what about the kids?"

"They're with Thomas' three in Sydney." Sirius had been a little dubious at first at letting his children be taken so far away but Thomas and Mione had both assured him that the children would be taken good care of by Thomas' parents and Theresa. With Faith wanting to attend the conference and Sirius needing to work, Sirius had decided that his youngest two would be far better off with someone he at least knew, rather than hiring a nanny or leaving them with the house-elves.

"I wish I was with his kids in Sydney." Tonks picked up her raincoat, which she'd dried with a spell on arriving at the Ministry. "Their weather has to be better than this."

"Why don't you take up James' offer and take the charms position when the temporary teacher leaves?" Sirius asked. "At least you wouldn't have to worry too much about being outside in bad weather then."

Tonks wasn't that fond of charms, and she also wasn't willing to give up the job she currently held. "I love my job at the primary school, Sirius. My apparition point is just around the corner from the school, whereas the school I'm teaching at today is quite a walk. And I'm only there because the primary school breaks up a day earlier than secondary school for half term, and the school board was desperate."

Sirius unwarded his office. "I'd better let you get back then."

Tonks recognized that Sirius wanted to head off to his meeting. "I'll see you tonight then."

"Five o'clock." Sirius reiterated as he locked his office door behind him and apparated away, leaving Tonks to walk to the elevator.

Covent Garden

Tonks arrived alone. "Hi, Cassie."

"Aunt Nymy." Cassandra grinned when Tonks pulled a face. "Sorry, I couldn't resist teasing. Where's Uncle James?"

"Faculty meeting." Tonks handed over a bottle of wine. "But he sent this for us."

Cassandra's face lit up. "I love this one."

"He knows." Tonks flopped onto the sofa. "And if you're ready, I'd kill for a glass of wine. Those buggers at the comprehensive were a pain in the arse. The next time the school board can whistle."

"Bad day?" Cassandra tapped the bottle of wine, instantly cooling it, before uncorking it, and grabbing two glasses out of the cupboard.

Tonks filled her glass nearly to the brim, and took a large mouthful sighing happily as the fruity taste exploded in her mouth. "That's better." She smiled at Cassandra. "This morning was fine but the pupils I had to teach this afternoon were more interested in the bell ringing than listening to me try and lecture about Shakespeare."

"I didn't realize that five year olds were particularly interested in him." Cassandra teased again.

Tonks stuck out her tongue. "I'm a fully qualified Muggle English teacher in case you're forgetting." She grinned. "But you're right. My usual class is more interested in what Jane and Peter, and their dog are up to."

Sirius and Harry suddenly appeared one after the other, Harry making his way over to Cassandra and kissing her. "Sorry we're a little late."

Cassandra rolled her eyes. "Harry, you're always a little late." She gave Tonks a slightly quirky grin. "Then again so am I; the only reason Dad let me out early was so that I'd be here to meet you."

Harry opened a bottle of red for him and Sirius. "So do we want to talk before or after dinner?"

"It depends on what's for dinner." Tonks, who'd make light work of getting through her rather overfull glass, replenished it again, before tipping the remainder of the bottle in Cassandra's glass, who too had quickly consumed the wine that had been poured in.

Cassandra was pleased to see the bottle refill when Tonks tapped it. "Exactly how many bottle's worth is that charged up with?"

"Three." Tonks had found that she was quite fond of the latest wine bottle that had only come onto the market a year earlier. "But I think

James would like it if I'm able to make it home in one piece so I'd better hold back a little."

"I'll apparate you back to Hogwarts if you drink too much." Sirius offered. "I need to go back to BritAD later anyway, so I can't have more than a few glasses myself."

"Why?" Tonks, ever nosy, asked.

"Surprise inspection." Sirius believed in checking on his teams at night as well as during the day, and he and Harry usually took turns to do so.

Harry by now had not only served Sirius' wine but had apparated out, returning with several large bags from which a delicious smell was emanating. "To answer your earlier question, Tonks, we're having fish and chips, as it's something I know you like, and it means I don't have to cook."

Tonks couldn't resist teasing Harry slightly, as she remembered the first meal the two of them had ever shared. "I do like this particular food; it helps to keep up my energy."

Harry too was reminded of why but wisely didn't mention it in front of his wife and father-in-law. "I also picked up a cheesecake for dessert."

It was now Cassandra's turn to smile to herself as she recalled a memorable occasion of eating the dessert in bed with Harry. "As long as it's white chocolate."

"It is." Harry grinned widely, feeling a little more comfortable with thoughts of his wife naked, rather than those of Tonks. "So let's sit down before this gets cold."

"It's not as if we couldn't warm it up." Cassandra remarked as she sat down.

"It doesn't taste the same." Tonks didn't bother with a plate, and simply ripped open her packet and bit into the golden battered fish. "Oh. That is good."

As they ate, the conversation inevitably turned to Tonks' discovery. "So do you think it's of any use or not?"

Harry shrugged. "Like Sirius, I'm not sure."

"Why don't you ask Frank?" Tonks asked.

"He only says one phrase." Sirius pointed out as he folded up his empty fish packet, having opted to eat his dinner in the same manner as Tonks had. "So he wouldn't respond anyway."

Tonks begged to differ. "A few of the children in my class have mild learning difficulties. I use not only words with them but objects and pictures. I know his case is a little more severe, but why don't you try it with Frank?"

Harry wanted to hear more. "What do you suggest?"

"The boy who gave the lecture mentioned Boeing having the FBW technology." Tonks took a mouthful of wine before continuing. "I looked the company up on the Internet before I came here. There are several models that carry the technology. Why don't we go to a toy store and purchase replicas of them, and show them to Frank?"

"But how will we know he's responding to them because he's familiar with them, and not just because he wants to play with them?" Sirius had seen Frank play with a shoelace when Sirius had tried to get something out of him on a previous occasion.

Tonks thought for a moment. "We could also buy some other things, such as a helicopter and a boat. See what he goes for."

Harry checked the time. "It's six o'clock. Do you know of any toy stores open this late?"

Tonks did. "A lot of the larger department stores will still be open. We can try Toys-R-Us."

Fifteen minutes later the group was walking around the toy store, Sirius staring around in amazement. "I've never seen so many toys in one place."

A harassed looking man with two small children in tow overheard him. "Just don't bring your kids with you like I did."

Sirius could hear the two small children begging for a playstation. "Err, I'll remember that."

Tonks eventually found what she was looking for. "They only come in kit form."

"Then let's buy these and whatever else we need and take them back to the apartment." Harry suggested. "It shouldn't take us too long to put them together."

On arriving back, Harry opened the first box and quickly unsnapped the components off the plastic frame they were attached to. He then placed them together and aimed his wand at them. "Congregos."

Copying Harry, the other three had soon completed their own models. Sirius picked up the model of the Airbus aircraft he'd just finished attaching stickers to. "I'd like to get this done tonight."

The healer at St. Mungo's was surprised to see the head of BritAD, his assistant and his wife, and a woman he didn't immediately recognize heading his way. "Commander Black, what can I do for everyone?"

"We need to see Frank." Sirius didn't explain why. "Is he in his room?"

Kenton Waterbrooke nodded. "Probably. He rarely leaves it; he prefers to sit and look though the window."

"Thanks." Sirius headed up the corridor, and even though he knew Frank wouldn't be aware or care, he still knocked on the door before leading the way into the large private room that Frank shared with Rupert Giles, who was lying on his bed staring into space. "Frank, it's Sirius, Harry and Cassie. We've brought someone new to see you. This is Tonks."

Frank didn't even look around, his attention firmly fixed on the newly darkened evening sky that he could see out of the window.

Harry pulled out a teddy bear from the bags they'd brought with them, and held it in front of Frank's face. "Frank, would you like this?"

The man merely moved his head so that he could continue to look outside. Harry therefore picked out his second object, a puzzle of one of the Great Pyramids that could be disassembled and was supposed to be a challenge to put back together. "Frank, do you recognize this?"

Again Frank didn't respond. Harry then took the boat, the helicopter and finally the various aircraft they'd assembled, and held them all up one by one in front of Frank, and received no response. Harry held his breath as he finally held up the model of the Boeing 777 that they'd chosen in front of Frank. "Frank, would you like this?"

Harry was about to withdraw the plane when he thought he saw a flicker of something in Frank's eyes. "It has fly-by-wire, Frank." Harry deliberately avoided using the phrase 'FBW'.

Suddenly Frank's hand shot out and grabbed the aircraft. "My baby. My baby."

Sirius sucked in his breath, as did everyone else. "I don't believe it."

As Frank cradled the model to him, an aircraft passed overhead, lights twinkling in the night, and a faint drone could be heard as the engines pushed the plane higher into the sky. Frank pressed his face against the glass. "Fly baby, fly."

Harry found that for some unknown reason his legs were shaking, and he sat down in one of the chairs that were in the room. "He recognized it, Sirius."

The group then received their second shock of the night when Rupert, who no-one had paid any attention to, climbed off his bed and grabbed the pyramid, lovingly stroking it. Harry, who was facing Rupert, was the only one who saw him do it. "Sirius, turn around."

Everyone turned around to look at what had startled Harry. Sirius whistled. "That's the first time we've seen any real response from him at all."

Rupert placed the pyramid on the table next to him, and picked up a pad, which was covered in messy scribbling that looked as though as a toddler had done it. That was about to change as he wrote down several notations before picking up the pyramid and studying it, and again writing down more things.

Getting up, Harry joined Sirius as they both looked down at the pad, which Rupert quickly pulled close to him so that they couldn't see. Harry had, however, already seen enough. "Those symbols are used by wardbreakers."

"Are you sure?" Sirius asked.

Harry nodded. "I only saw them for a moment but I'm pretty sure."

Sirius aimed his wand at Rupert. "Somnio."

As Rupert fell asleep, Harry took the pad from him. "I've not seen these ones before." He pointed to the second group of notations. "But the first I have."

"I think we need to pay a housecall." Sirius decided. "Tonks, I'm sorry but you and Cassie will have to head home. Wait for us at the apartment."

"I really should be getting back to Hogwarts." Tonks answered regretfully. "James' meeting will be over shortly."

"I'll come back with you." Cassandra decided. "I haven't seen little James or Eleanor in a while." Eleanor was Katherine and Orion's one year old daughter, and James was Tonks and James' six month old son.

As the two girls left, Tonks complaining about bloody secrets and clearances, Harry and Sirius apparated out from the hospital to the closest apparition point to Anna Jameson's house.

Anna opened the door a few moments after Sirius' knock sounded on it. "Yes?"

Harry could hear someone else in the house. "May we come in?"

Anna let the two men into the house, and led them into the sitting room where a redheaded man was sitting with a glass of wine. The two had obviously been in the middle of a game of chess. "What is this about, Commander Black?"

"I'm afraid you're wanted for questioning about a possible fraud at Gringotts Bank dating back to when you were working for them." Sirius lied, not wanting to reveal the true reason they needed to speak to her. "You're going to have to come along with us to BritAD."

The redheaded man stood up. "You can't be serious. You know as well as I do that Anna was a respected member of the Bank."

"This is between Miss Jameson and us, Bill." Sirius said gently. "So if you'll excuse us."

Bill turned to Anna. "I'll arrange for my lawyer to meet you at BritAD."

Anna refused his offer. "That won't be necessary, Bill. Dad has plenty of lawyers I can use if I need one but thank you." She kissed him on the cheek. "I'll get this sorted, and I'll see you on Saturday."

Bill turned to Harry and Sirius. "You're making a mistake."

"If we are, then Miss Jameson will be able to clear it up when we question her." Sirius responded before turning to Anna. "Take my arm."

Bill scowled and vanished. The moment he did so, Anna became all businesslike. "Do you want to talk to me here or is there somewhere you want me to meet you?"

"St. Mungo's." Sirius instructed as he dropped his arm, aware that Anna hated side-apparition. "Override the wards, and meet me in Rupert's room."

Anna did as Sirius had told her, arriving moments after he did. "Why are we here?"

Harry handed her the pad that he'd removed from Rupert earlier that evening. "Do you recognize these?"

After glancing at the pad, Anna immediately nodded. "They're a form of hieroglyphics used predominantly by the Egyptian wardbreakers." She indicated some of the larger symbols. "These signify that the entrance is to be found beneath the fourth level, and that it is booby-trapped. Usually you'd make a note of what types of traps."

"Do you know what type of traps you'd find in a pyramid like this?" Harry held up the toy that Rupert had grabbed.

"That's an approximation of the Great Pyramid of Giza I presume." Anna turned the toy over in her hands after taking it from Harry, as she recalled what she knew about it. "On the fourth level I believe that the wardbreakers found, among other things, an acid barrier, a decapitation spell, and a breath robbing pocket."

"Write down the notations on the pad." Harry instructed.

Anna put down the pyramid, and picked up a quill from the side table and did as she'd been bidden. "Okay, will one of you now tell me what this has to do with Rupert?"

"We're not sure." Harry woke Rupert up and handed him the pyramid.

After looking at it, Rupert immediately grabbed the pad out of Anna's hand, and wrote several more notations down. Anna could see them. "I obviously missed a few traps."

Rupert was now making more notations, tumbling the pyramid over before starting to disassemble it. Even though his lips were moving, he made no sound. Harry turned to Sirius and Anna. "Let's head back to BritAd. We can't talk here."

Anna moved to kiss Rupert who pulled back, the notepad and pyramid being clutched against him. "He's never reacted like that before."

"We'll talk back at my office." Sirius told her, and he vanished; Harry following directly behind him.

On arriving a few minutes later at BritAd, Anna sat down. "So what's going on?"

Sirius began to tell her. "We needed to check something with Frank so we took in a selection of things for him to view. We'd just made a breakthrough with Frank when Rupert grabbed one of the items we'd brought with us."

"The pyramid?" Anna guessed.

"Correct." Sirius confirmed. "Then Rupert made the notations. Harry thought he recognized one set but not the other. Do you have any idea why Rupert would be cognizant with these?"

Anna didn't, and explained her own familiarity with them. "No, and I'm only au fait with them because I did some work for the Egyptian magical government at Luxor. Not being magical, I don't see why Rupert would be aware of them."

"Perhaps it has something to do with the Council." Harry suggested.

"Remus will know." Sirius got up and vanished, before returning with his friend twenty minutes later. "Sit down."

Remus kissed Anna on the cheek, before doing as Sirius had instructed him to. "This is a surprise."

"You have level one clearance?" Anna asked in a shocked voice, knowing that Sirius wouldn't have revealed her presence to Remus unless he had.

Sirius nodded. "I gave it to him when Cassie was injured when Starr attacked her, and I haven't seen any reason to revoke it since."

"So what is this about, and why is Anna here?" Remus was just as curious as to why Anna would be questioning his clearance, and as to why he'd been dragged away from the conference he was holding.

Sirius told him, and then asked about Rupert. "I need to know whether Rupert has ever done any work for the Watchers' Council that involved these sort of techniques."

Remus immediately shook his head. "We have a specific department that deals with this sort of thing, and Rupert never interacted with it. He said it wasn't his cup of tea."

"Then why the hell does he have this knowledge?" Sirius asked out loud.

"I have no idea." Remus was just as mystified as his friend. "So putting Rupert aside, what's the verdict on Frank?"

"I'd better fill Anna in on what's happening first." Given her input that night, and the fact she had level one security clearance, Sirius decided to brief Anna on the full situation. "Dominus isn't quite what you think he is. And we believe that Dominus used a ritual to steal Frank's original body, and his memories. Up until tonight Frank had only ever used one phrase."

Anna had heard it when she'd been visiting Rupert. "My baby's an FBW."

Sirius confirmed her supposition. "He recognized a Boeing 777 when Harry handed it to him. Frank then looked up as a Muggle aircraft went overhead and said 'fly baby, fly'. We therefore believe that he's a pilot or at least he was, or perhaps that he might have been what the Muggles call a 'plane spotter'. We need to find out who he was originally as we know he's the person Dominus swapped bodies with."

"How could you know he's the person Dominus swapped bodies with, if you don't know who Frank really is?" Anna queried.

Harry wasn't surprised that the intelligent woman had asked such a question. "We know what Dominus originally looked like, as well as the fact that he only had one arm."

Anna gave a dry laugh. "So you're looking for a former one-armed wizard who now has both arms, has knowledge of Muggle aircraft, and who might be a pilot or a plane spotter? Good luck with that."

Sirius could understand her derision. "I know that it's not much to go on, but it's all we've got."

Remus reminded Sirius of a previous deduction they'd made. "We also know that Dominus owns Castrum House, and the money to purchase it was likely to have come from Frank."

Harry joined back in with the conversation. "Having been there, I can tell you that if the funds came from Frank, then whoever Frank was, he was obviously wealthy. It's a sizable house, has at least ten bedrooms, with a great deal of land surrounding it. To afford that sort of house you'd need some serious sort of cash."

Anna still wasn't exactly inspired. "So if the money was originally Frank's, then we can say that Frank probably was a rich pilot or plane spotter with a fondness for Boeing planes. It still isn't much to go on."

"Which is why we've been struggling to track down Frank's original persona." Harry clarified.

Anna fell silent for a few minutes, as she mulled over what she'd been told, her analytical mind ticking over quickly. "You showed Frank several models of aircraft, didn't you?"

Harry identified the ones they'd shown him. "But he specifically honed in on the Boeing 777, even though one of the other aircraft was also a Boeing."

"What if Frank was a pilot, and not just any pilot. Given your deductions about Castrum House, what if Frank was rich enough not only to pilot but to also own a Boeing 777?" Anna asked as she continued to reflect on what they'd told her.

"Why would you think that?" Sirius queried.

Anna began to lay out her train of thought. "You said Frank called the aircraft 'his baby'. Let's assume that he was speaking literally, and didn't just have a fondness for that particular model, and actually owned one. It would begin to help us focus in on who he might be."

"You're right. If we make that assumption, it would certainly narrow down the field." Sirius remarked. "How many rich wizarding pilots who own a plane like that can there be?"

"I know of at least four who straddle the Muggle and Magical worlds." Anna began to list them. "Dad for one. Gupta Raj, the Indian based magnate, Helen Scott who owns Scott Bartlett Industries, but I think we can rule her out as she's nearly hundred and twenty, and the Seville family who owns the Seville Corporation."

Harry, Remus and Sirius all exchanged horrified looks as Anna's words sank in. Then Harry shook his head. "It can't be Thomas. We've ruled him out already."

"Why can't it be him?" Anna wanted to know why Harry had rejected her suggestion.

Harry outlined Dominus and his background, and some of the reasons they'd dismissed him.

Anna was incredulous. "You eliminated Seville because he appeared on Muggle television when Dominus was supposed to be injured?" She shook her head. "You seem to be forgetting about polyjuice potion."

Harry had already thought about that. "I did consider polyjuice potion, but Thomas' wife said she'd spent all week with him. I know a lot about Dominus' history, and what he did to a former lover who slept with someone else." Harry then outlined what had believed to have happened to Dominus' former lover and the man she'd betrayed him with. "If it was Thomas, there's absolutely no way he would have let anyone sleep with Mione."

"You said that Dominus was seriously injured during the attack on the Museum, didn't you?" Anna checked, before continuing when Sirius nodded. "What if he was unconscious and had no say in the matter, or Mione already knows who he is?"

"Mione wouldn't betray us like that." Harry snapped, his hackles going up at the suggestion.

Sirius sighed. "Harry, we thought the same about Cammie."

"Your niece has betrayed you?" Anna asked. "I thought she was studying abroad."

Harry found himself telling Anna what had happened with Cammie as well as Harry Potter's current position. "So H.J. has ended up not only losing his daughter, but James has effectively lost Harry to Dominus as well."

"Your friend had access to both of them. I'd say the mysterious Dominus is looking more and more like Seville with everything you're telling me." Anna told them.

Sirius thought of another reason it couldn't be Thomas, despite what Anna thought. "Thomas also has an iron-clad alibi from Gringotts when the attack on myself took place. He was in a meeting with my brother and Bill Weasley at the time."

Anna raised an eyebrow. "How do you know that they're not part of it? Gringotts was already suspicious of Bill, otherwise I wouldn't have been dating him then."

"I checked Regulus for a Dark Mark." Sirius informed her. "He was clean."

"There's more than one way for a Protean Charm to work, Sirius." Anna informed him. "It can also be imbued into an item such as an earring, a necklace or a ring for a short amount of time."

Even though he knew that, Sirius defended his brother again. "Regulus is innocent. And we're just hypothesizing, as for all we know Frank could be a simple plane spotter, and not a rich pilot who owns a Boeing."

Anna shook her head in dismay. "Sirius, while that's true about Frank and perhaps I am just jumping to conclusions about Seville, it doesn't change the fact that both you and Harry have leapt to the defense of two people you obviously care about deeply, even though the evidence suggests otherwise. If I've learnt one valuable lesson through wardbreaking and sneaking around as I do, it's not to take people at face value, no matter how much you think you can trust them." She began to give them an example. "Take Rupert for instance, who would have thought that he was aware of wardbreaking..." Her voice trailed off. "Oh Merlin."

"Anna?" Remus felt the shock and horror that was suddenly rippling off her. From Harry's face he could see that he'd felt it too. "What's wrong?"

"I have a feeling I know what happened to Rupert." Anna responded in a choked voice.

Remus' heart skipped a beat. "What do you think happened to him, Anna?"

"He's Bill Weasley." Anna's voice was shaking horribly. "I think Dominus carried out the same ritual on him as he did on Frank."

"As you've just pointed out to me, you're again just jumping to conclusions." Sirius still didn't want to believe that Regulus had indeed betrayed him, which would be the case if what Anna were saying true.

Anna validated her guess. "Remus has confirmed that as far as he knew Rupert had no knowledge of Egyptian wardbreaking; but Bill did. Seville was involved in a meeting with him when you were attacked here at the Ministry. And whoever brought down the wards here in the Ministry was skilled, Sirius. You can't deny it. The same goes for the British Museum. I loved Rupert but I'll be among the first to admit that he was terribly jealous of Remus and the fact that he was magical. What if Dominus offered him a magical body in exchange for something?"

"Information about the Four Pillars." Remus said quietly. "Rupert had knowledge of the Slayer prophecies; he's far more learned about them than I ever was. The oaths we swore meant that such information couldn't be extracted forcibly. Rupert would have had to have given the knowledge freely."

Harry could see the logic in the Remus' assumption. "You think Dominus offered Rupert Bill's body and magic in exchange for the knowledge about the Four Pillars?"

Anna interrupted as Harry again mentioned the Pillars. "Four Pillars?"

"Four artifacts which when combined render the user immortal." Sirius shortened the bumph. "And Thomas is aware of the first one, and owns the second."

"Then I'd say you've got your man." Anna responded shakily.

"We still need more solid proof." Sirius responded, his belief in his brother blinding him to accepting the possibility that Regulus could have betrayed him. "This is just conjecture."

"I think we should call a meeting." Remus decided. "Get everyone else's input. I think I can already guess what Luna is going to say."

Harry grimaced. "If it is him, then she'll be fully entitled to say 'I told you so'. None of us wanted to listen to her."

"What about Mione?" Remus' thoughts turned to his assistant.

"We're not telling her." Sirius spoke up before Harry could.

Harry scowled. "We can't leave her with him if he is Dominus."

"We're still not sure it is him, Harry." Sirius said in a firm voice. "For the time being she remains in the dark. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Sir." Harry recognized an order when he saw one. "What about your children?"

"As I'm not convinced that Thomas is Dominus, I'm going to leave them where they are." Sirius turned to Remus and Anna. "This is a highly confidential matter, and I expect you, like Harry, to keep this to yourselves."

Even though Remus didn't like it, he had to agree to Sirius' demand, and Anna did so freely.

"Let's get everyone organized." Harry suggested. "I think we should meet at Remus' apartment as it's nowhere near Grimmauld Square. Even though it's late, I don't want to take the chance of Thomas dropping by."

Sirius then addressed Remus. "If you want Buffy in on this, then like you and Anna, she'll have to swear to keep it confidential."

Remus wasn't sure she would want to attend, as Buffy was still upset over their still somewhat recent break-up. "I'm not sure if she will come; she has the girls with her. I'll also have to haul Xander and Luna back from New York."

"You'd better include Faith when you contact them." Sirius had a question. "What will you tell Mione?"

"That Nicole has a problem." Remus had left his sister in charge of the Academy, while Xander and Luna were attending the Watchers' Council conference. "It's the perfect excuse as to why I've brought Xander and Luna back, if Mione asks when I return tomorrow."

"You have to return?" Sirius inquired.

"Sirius, I'm the head of the Council." Remus reminded him. "I can hardly bugger off totally in the middle of a conference I'm supposed to be running, especially as this may well turn out to be nothing."

"You have a point." Sirius was aware that he'd feel the same way. "Remus, you deal with those at the conference then. Harry, if you'd like to contact Tonks and the others at Potter Place, and I'll contact James, Orion and Katherine."

"And me?" Anna asked, now unwilling to leave after she'd been included.

"After I've floored the US, I need to go and see Buffy. If you don't mind listening to us bicker, you can come with me." Remus offered, before addressing Harry. "Tell Tonks, Katherine and Hermione that they can put the children in my spare room. There are two cribs and a bed in there, and it's warded so that they'll know if there's a problem. If Buffy wants to attend, we can simply enlarge the cribs."

The four of them then disbanded to contact the people they'd been assigned to.

The Watchers' Academy

As everyone in the pensieve listened to Anna's suggestion that Mione might know the truth about Thomas, the group became loudly opinionated, with not everyone believing that she did. As the arguing voices got louder and more confusing to listen to, Anna stuck her fingers in her mouth and whistled as loudly as she could. Silence reigned as everyone looked around at her. Anna put her hands on her hips. "It was only a suggestion but those who believe she does know should remember that it's just as likely that she doesn't, and vice versa."

"I'm with H.J." Buffy didn't look at Remus as she spoke up. "I can't see how she wouldn't know if he was Dominus."

Harry turned on his brother. "I can't believe that you think Mione knows, H.J. After everything we've gone through, and given what Voldemort did, she wouldn't still be with him if she found out."

"Voldemort?" Anna questioned. "I thought we were talking about Dominus."

"Long story short." Harry decided that he may as well tell her the full story. "Dominus is from another world, and he came here via the archway in the Death Chamber. In that world he was known as Voldemort; he's basically the same person as the Voldemort who was killed in the Azkaban destruction. I'm also from that world, as is Mione. H.J.'s also from there but from a different timeline. Principally we were sent here to destroy him."

Anna stared at Harry for a long time, noting that no-one else seemed surprised. "You're not joking are you?"

"No." Harry informed her. "That's why I'm having a hard time understanding how H.J. could even contemplate the notion that Mione would betray us in such a manner."

"You were willing to believe the same of my daughter." H.J. snapped. "As was I. Mione's been married to Thomas for almost seven years, Harry. You know how she feels about him. And as it's already been mentioned, she's the one who found the first two Pillars for Thomas. If it is him, then we both know that he has all four Pillars." H.J. then came up with his most convincing piece of evidence. "And she has to have seen his name when they adopted the twins and Bella. When I made the potion to adopt Cammie and dripped it onto the parchment, not only did my current name come up, but my real name as well."

Anna decided not to ask even though she was curious, as Harry continued to defend his former wife. "I'm well aware of what happens, H.J. but I refuse to even think for one second that she knows. I'm quite sure Thomas would have found a way around it if he is

Dominus." Harry responded, everyone else listening quietly as the two brothers argued.

"And I'm quite sure you're letting your feelings for Mione cloud your judgment." H.J. countered. "She's not the same woman you were married to."

This time Anna couldn't help herself and blurted out. "You were married to Mione?"

"A very long time ago." Harry answered. "And out of everyone here, I'd say that qualifies me more than anyone else to make a judgment on Mione."

Sirius interrupted just as H.J. went to open his mouth again. "Harry, everyone is entitled to their own opinion on Mione."

Harry believed that Sirius also thought Mione knew. "You believe Anna's supposition, don't you?"

"No." Sirius answered truthfully. "But I'm keeping an open mind. You know as well as I do that we don't eliminate possible leads of inquiry until we've ascertained whether they're fact or supposition."

Harry had to admit that Sirius had a point. "Who believes that she knows?"

H.J. raised his hand as did Hermione, Buffy, Faith, and Severus.

Harry turned to those who hadn't raised their hands. "And I take it that Sirius and Anna are both reserving judgment?"

"As am I." Tonks spoke up.

"And you can include me on the fence sitters." James piped up.

Anna made a good point. "To be honest it doesn't matter what we believe about Mione. Even though I'm obviously the last person to be admitted to this club, I'd say that our biggest problem is whether or not Seville is truly Dominus or not."

H.J. knew what he was about to suggest would piss Harry off. "I think we should interrogate Mione."

"We are not interrogating Mione, H.J." Harry was getting a little fed up with H.J.; no longer caring whether he had a right to express an opinion or not. "She's innocent."

"You don't know that, Harry." H.J. still wasn't backing down from his stance. "You have no real idea of what's she capable of."

"I do." Harry snarled at him, his eyes beginning to change.

"Harry, I tortured a man in ways I never thought I'd be capable of at one time, and I did it all because of love." H.J. argued. "You've seen Mione with Thomas. She loves him almost beyond reason, and they have three children together. Do you really think if she found out who he was, and he gave her a choice of giving up the children or staying with him that she couldn't be swayed? People have done a lot worse in the name of love."

"Not Mione." Harry was by now almost nose to nose with H.J. as he stared his brother down.

H.J., however, refused to be cowed by him. "Yes, Harry, even Mione. If it is Thomas, then it's him who'd obviously been giving my daughter lessons in the Darks Arts that led to her becoming a Death Eater. Cammie stayed on that Island with them for weeks at a time. Can you really tell me that Mione wouldn't have known? They took Cammie to Egypt to look at those damn Cartouches, and Mione knew about the Four Pillars then."

"And you know as well I do that she considered them Muggle twaddle." Harry answered, his voice now just below the level that could be considered shouting.

"She probably only said that because she didn't want Cammie blabbing about them." In contrast to Harry, H.J. was actually shouting. "It certainly answers why Cammie was never harmed during the entire time she was held at Castrum House. Cammie even said she

had a female teacher. Who's to say that it was Lily? We both know that Lily hated her. So stop thinking with your dick and think with your mind."

At H.J.'s crude comment, Harry grabbed him by the throat. "SHE DOESN'T KNOW."

Cassandra grabbed Harry's arm. "Let him go, Harry."

Taking a deep breath, Harry let H.J. drop to the ground. "She doesn't know, H.J."

"I'm not listening to this." H.J. struggled to his feet. "When you manage to put aside your feelings for your former wife, and are ready to listen to reason, let me know."

Sirius intervened. "H.J. you are not to approach Mione."

"But..." H.J. responded.

"That's an order, Sebastian." Sirius snapped. "You will not go anywhere near her. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Sir." H.J. responded but he didn't sound that convincing.

Hearing the tone in H.J.'s voice and able to detect how angry his brother was, Harry warned him off as well. "Keep away from her, H.J."

"I've already said I would." H.J. turned to Cassandra. "I'm sorry about my last comment." He then vanished as he withdrew from the pensieve. Hermione didn't say anything, and simply followed her husband.

Sirius sighed. "Harry, you didn't exactly handle that well."

"Sirius, while I might not be in love with Mione anymore nor, as H.J. so disgustingly put it, am I thinking about her with my dick,..." Harry put his arm around his wife at that point. "...I know her and her background well enough to categorically state that she would never

stay with Thomas if he is Dominus." Harry ran a hand through his hair. "I'm not sure Mione is going to forgive me for telling everyone this but as Voldemort, Dominus had her mother raped by his Inner Circle when she refused to marry him. Mione is the result of that rape."

"You're kidding, right?" Anna felt as though her head was going to explode with the knowledge she was accumulating.

Luna confirmed Harry's words. "She told Cassandra, Katherine and myself some time ago."

On hearing Harry's explanation, Faith apologized, and altered her opinion. "I'm sorry that I thought she'd stay with him. No woman in their right mind would."

Buffy, however, still hurt from her break-up with Remus, and far from enamored with Mione, continued to disagree. "Angel killed Giles' girlfriend, and tried to kill my friends, and I was still willing to forgive him. H.J.'s right, Harry. You might think you know Mione, but you never truly know how someone feels inside. I betrayed my friends' trust for love. You can't say for sure that Mione wouldn't as well."

Cassandra squeezed Harry's arm to warn him not to say anything. "As we're still not even sure Thomas is Dominus, I really think that this conversation about Mione is currently pointless. I believe that we should agree not to say anything to her at the moment. Once we discover what the truth is, then we can make a decision."

Harry realized that Cassandra was right. "So we're no further along in deciding whether he's Dominus or not."

Sirius yawned. "Look, I think we should call it a night. If anyone comes up with anything concrete, then contact either Harry or myself. In the meantime, I'll investigate the other possibilities that Anna mentioned."

One by one, everyone left until finally just Anna and Remus remained. "We barely touched upon Rupert."

"After tonight, I'm not sure I want to." Remus headed into the kitchen. "Do you want a cup of tea?"

Anna smiled. "I'd like that." She sat down on one of the bar stools. "Buffy is still pretty cut up about your break-up, isn't she?"

"Yes." Remus switched the kettle on. "Our relationship has been tumultuous at best, but as you know, we decided to try and make a go of things when she got pregnant with Emily. I asked her to marry me when things were going through a really good patch, and she fell pregnant with Sophia before we could get married. It's probably a good job as Sophia was barely two months old when we began arguing again, and while we again tried to patch things up, during last year things really began to disintegrate. And as you probably already know, Buffy moved out about six months' ago."

"You must miss them." Anna helped herself to a cookie that Remus had just placed onto a plate.

"I do." Remus gave a bittersweet smile. "It's silly things that I've missed, like Sophia's babbling, and Emily's constant questions, and it hurts like hell. I just wish we could have worked it out."

"Are you still in love with Buffy?" Anna could hear the regret in Remus' voice as he talked.

"I never was." Remus admitted. "But she's my children's mother, and I genuinely care a great deal for her."

Anna followed Remus into the sitting room as he carried the tray in. "I'm sorry that your relationship didn't work out."

"So is the relationship between you and Bill serious?" Remus asked, still believing Anna to be in a genuine relationship with the redhead.

Now knowing that Remus had level one clearance, Anna grimaced. "He was actually a job for BritAD. I work freelance for them, which is why I left Gringotts after finding nothing out. So after failing to come up with anything concrete, I ended the relationship a few months after I left, and we're just friends now." She shuddered. "And if what we

believe about Rupert is true, then it turns out I might have spent two years dating a man I thought was lost to me."

"But it doesn't really count as dating if you're investigating him, does it?" Remus poured out the tea, and then passed Anna a mug.

"No, and thank goodness that I was only investigating him, and not really dating him." Anna took a sip of the hot, strong brew. "It would be too weird to think that I'd slept with Rupert in another person's body."

"You didn't sleep with him in two years?" Remus was surprised by Anna's implication.

"I told him that I regretted sleeping with Rupert before we were married, and that if I was ever to consider sleeping with someone again, I'd have to be married. He wasn't exactly enamored with my response, but if Bill isn't Bill, then I'm not surprised." Anna revealed then that 'Bill' had hoped for more. "He's actually asked me to marry him a couple of times, and I've obviously said no."

"So you're saving yourself for marriage then?" Remus wasn't sure if she was telling the truth about her regret or not.

Anna shook her head. "That's just what I told Bill."

"So are you involved in another relationship now?" Remus put down his mug, and leant back against the sofa. He knew that Anna was attracted to him, just as he was to her. Over the previous few years they'd met for lunch and dinner occasionally, and he couldn't deny that if they'd both been single, he would have asked her out.

"No, I'm not." Anna met Remus' gaze as she put down her own mug. "So are you going to kiss me or tell me that I'm wrong in thinking that you're interested?"

"I want to kiss you but I'm not sure that I'm ready for another relationship quite just yet." Despite knowing that he was attracted to Anna, Remus still had reservations. "And the fact that you were once engaged to Rupert is a little disconcerting."

"An engagement that is long in the past." Anna leant forward and lightly brushed her lips against Remus. "And I'm not asking you to marry me, just if you want me to stay the night."

Remus tangled his fingers in Anna's hair, and held her head still as he returned the kiss. "I don't want to hurt you."

"If you're talking about my feelings, then don't worry." Anna moved her mouth to kiss Remus' neck. "I've already told you I'm not looking for undying love from you." She moved her mouth to gently nip his earlobe as his hand moved to her hip. "And if you're talking about hurting me physically, then don't worry about that either; I'm a lot stronger than I look. My grandmother was a werewolf and I've inherited many of her attributes including her strength."

Remus pulled back. "So you know what I am?"

"Rupert told me a long time ago." Anna shrugged. "And given my family background I'd be a hypocrite to condemn you for something you can't help." She touched Remus' face. "So if we've finished talking, I have a better way of occupying our time."

Remus stood up and held out his hand. "I'm a little old for necking on the sofa, and think I'd prefer to move this to somewhere a little more comfortable."

"I couldn't agree more." Anna let Remus pull her up "Lead the way."

Remus opened the door to his bedroom, before stepping aside to let her enter, and then closing the door behind him.

One week later

Harry waited at the classroom door for H.J. to finish his lecture. As it finished a few students politely greeted him, but most avoided his eyes. H.J. scowled at him. "What do you want?"

With a few students still in the room, Harry had little choice but to take H.J. to task. "I beg your pardon, Sebastian?"

"Sorry, SIR." H.J.'s voice dripped with sarcasm. "May I help you?"

The last student left, and Harry closed the door. "H.J. while you may currently have a personal problem with me, I expect you to show some professionalism while you're here at work."

H.J. knew that Harry had a point. "Then I apologize for my rudeness. What can I do for you?"

"I need you to take my class tomorrow afternoon. I have a meeting." Harry told him.

"Leave me your notes, and I'll do it." With that H.J. picked up his things and limped out of the room.

Harry apparated back to his office, and knocked on Sirius' door. "H.J. is going to take my class, so I won't have to ask Cass to cover for me."

"How rude was he?" Sirius had overheard H.J. a couple of times.

"No worse than usual." Harry responded. "I'm going to let it go once more as I attacked him first but I have to admit that my patience is running out."

"If I hear him again, I'm going to have to discipline him, Harry." Sirius warned. "He's behaving like a child."

"He's upset about Cammie." Harry still felt obliged to defend H.J.

"She's been a Death Eater now for almost four years, Harry." Sirius pointed out. "If he'd been in your position and it had been his former wife who'd been under suspicion, I have no doubt he'd have reacted as you did. I'm sorry, but I've let it slide for a week, and unlike you, my patience has now run out."

"I understand." Harry closed the door behind him, and disappeared back into his own office. As he ploughed through the paperwork that was waiting for him, he found his mind wandering. Even though H.J.

had been told not to approach Mione, Harry found himself wondering, given H.J.'s increasing belligerence, whether he would do so. Deciding his brother wasn't as stupid as to ignore a direct order, Harry forced himself to focus on his current occupation.

He'd shortly find out that he was wrong, and that H.J. was that stupid.

Next Chapter: H.J. makes a huge mistake; Mione's world is turned upside down.

As this is the last chapter I'll be posting before the end of the year, I hope everyone has a Happy New Year!

Chapter 65: The Man Behind the Mask

April 16th 2010 - Grimmauld Square

Hermione was surprised to see her brother-in-law walking in, and she smiled brightly. "Harry, I thought you were at a meeting with H.J."

Harry was at a loss as to what meeting he was supposed to be at. "I don't know of any meeting."

"But H.J. said that he had a meeting with you just after eight, and that he was running late." Hermione's smile faltered, as she remembered how abruptly her husband had announced the meeting, claiming he'd forgotten to tell Hermione about it until then. "Harry, you don't think he's done something stupid do you?"

"I've probably just forgotten that I'm supposed to be meeting with him, or he's gotten his wires crossed. I'll apparate to the Ministry and I'll be back as soon as I can." Harry apparated out, heading back to the office to let Cassandra know what was happening, before apparating to check the meeting rooms.

When Harry arrived back at Potter Place fifteen minutes later after a thorough search of the Ministry, he found his wife, Sirius and Hermione waiting for him, Cassandra having alerted Sirius by firecall. "He's not there."

"Where the hell can he be then?" Hermione was now starting to worry.

Sirius posed a theory. "Despite our warnings, do you think he's gone to confront Mione?"

"I certainly hope not. I've made an important discovery about Mione and Thomas, and wanted to talk to you about it." Harry then revealed why he'd gone to Grimmauld Square in the first place. "As you'd locked me out of Grimmauld Place, I'd apparated here to walk over to see you, when Hermione surprised me with the news of a meeting."

"Why did you lock Harry out of Grimmauld Place, Dad?" Cassandra asked, a little surprised to hear that her father had barred her husband, as she herself had had no problem contacting her father.

"I was busy." Sirius wasn't going to tell his daughter that he had been making love to his wife in the hallway, and didn't want to be interrupted, and that he'd only just dropped the wards when Cassandra firecalled.

Cassandra blushed as she read correctly between the lines. "Sorry, Dad."

Sirius shrugged, not wanting his daughter to feel uncomfortable. "It's not important. What Harry obviously has to tell me must be."

"It is." Harry was aware that his news wouldn't exactly come as a shock, but it wouldn't be good news either. "Thomas is most definitely Dominus, and Mione doesn't know who he is."

"Then if H.J.'s gone to confront Mione, he could be walking into a trap." Sirius swore. "The fucking idiot."

Ashen, Hermione grabbed at the desk to the side of her. "If what you say is right, Thomas will kill him this time."

Harry decided there was only one way to deal with this, and he headed to the fireplace. "Seville residence, Grimmauld Square."

After a few moments, Mione's head appeared. "Harry, is this important? I've got a wet little madam in my arms."

Harry could hear Bella babbling away to her mother, and he realized that nothing of import could be happening there, but he decided to make sure anyway. "Hermione and H.J. have had a bit of a row, and I was wondering whether he was there with you or Thomas."

Mione's disembodied head shook from side to side. "No, H.J.'s not here. Thomas is out anyway. He's got an evening meeting up North, which is why we're not staying on the Island this weekend. Can I help find H.J. when I've finished with the kids?"

Harry smiled and responded negatively. "No. I'll head for the pub. I'm sure that's where he's gone."

"Sorry, Harry but I can't hold this slippery little eel any longer. Let me know if you find him." Mione's head then disappeared.

Hermione let out a sigh of relief. "I was half afraid he'd gone there."

Harry hated to be the one to destroy Hermione's freshly restored peace of mind. "You're forgetting something important. Mione said that Thomas has an evening meeting. Harry had already told me that there was going to be a meeting some time this week, but that it was nothing important, and I didn't need to attend. As this is the first meeting that Thomas has held since Anna's discovery, H.J. could have gone there to confront Thomas in front of his men. H.J.'s Dark Mark would have let him know that a meeting was being held, and it would certainly explain why H.J. left so abruptly."

Sirius decided that it was likely that Harry was correct. "So we can safely deduce that H.J. lied about where he was going. And H.J. said he had a meeting just after eight, right?"

Hermione confirmed Sirius' estimation, and Sirius looked at the time. "It's eight-thirty now, so it's likely that a Death Eater meeting could still be going on if that's where H.J. has gone."

"I'd best go check." Harry went to disappear, only for Cassandra to grab his arm. "Cass, I know what you're going to say. But I'm the only one who can get in there. Hopefully, I won't be long." Harry was true to his word, and returned five minutes later, a white mask in his hand. "H.J. obviously hasn't gone there, otherwise the place would have been in uproar. Instead the meeting appears to be over as there were just a few stragglers in the ballroom."

Hermione was now totally lost as to where H.J. could be. "If he didn't go there, and he didn't go to the Ministry, then where did he go?"

Cassandra made a suggestion that she was aware wouldn't be well received. "I'm sorry to ask this, but do you think he could be having an affair?"

"I trust my husband." Hermione didn't like the question but understood why Cassandra had asked it. "But I am concerned as to where he's gone."

Sirius tapped his ring. "He should have answered the alert; I'll check at the Ministry." However, when Sirius returned five minutes later he was alone. "I'm starting to get concerned myself now."

Hermione was starting to become frightened. "What if he's hurt?"

"We'd better start a search." Sirius decided. "I'll ask Remus to help." At that moment Sirius wanted his friend's support more than ever. Not just to help to try locate H.J. but as someone to talk to, especially given what Harry had just confirmed about Thomas, and what it meant about Regulus.

"I'll start looking as well." Harry slipped off a spare ring. "Hermione, stay here. If H.J. returns, then tap the ring four times."

Not really wanting to stay behind, but aware that someone had to, Hermione slipped on the ring as everyone else apparated away to find H.J., none of them aware of the firestorm that H.J. was just about to incite.

Seville residence

Mione made her way downstairs from bathing the children. She had no idea that she'd been watched both bathing them and talking to Harry by H.J., who'd used an invisibility spell to hide himself.

H.J. carefully made his way downstairs behind Mione. He'd have grabbed her earlier but he hadn't wanted to frighten the children. Making sure his mask was in place, he dropped the invisibility spell causing Mione to give a small scream, and begin to draw her wands.

His wand already in his hand, H.J. petrified her, before hurrying over to her and removing her wands. "You have to be faster than that to beat me, Mione. Imperio."

Now in a fog, Mione could do little as H.J. put his arm around her waist, and apparated them both out to Castrum House to confront Thomas.

Because of what had happened with Cammie and Harry Sebastian years earlier, Thomas had altered the rings he, Mione, his children and Cammie all wore, so that he'd be able to detect a problem through the wards of Castrum House, and, therefore when Mione had screamed in fear, Thomas' ring had begun to vibrate. He quickly addressed Regulus. "I'll be back shortly."

"What's wrong?" Regulus couldn't miss the concerned look on Thomas' usually implacable face.

"My wife." His words barely out of his mouth, Thomas disappeared, reappearing at his home in Grimmauld Square where he called out to his wife, not realizing that he'd just missed her by a matter of a seconds. "Mione?"

Even though he hadn't been sure that Grimmauld Square had been Thomas' destination, Regulus decided to apparate there anyway, and now appeared beside him. "Is she here?"

Thomas shook his head. "It doesn't appear that way." He summoned a house-elf. "Where's my wife?"

"Mistress Mione nots here, Master Thomas." The house-elf didn't know where Mione had gone, just that she'd left the property.

Deciding to make sure that his children were okay, Thomas apparated upstairs to find Theresa reading to them. "Is Mione around?"

"She said something about popping round to see Hermione Sebastian." Theresa informed her employer, who looked worried. "Is everything okay, Mr. Thomas?"

"Yes." Relaxing, Thomas smiled at his daughter who was trying to gain his attention by calling out 'Daddy'. "Your Daddy has to go out."

"I want a hug, Daddy." Maddie held out her arms.

Thomas bent down and hugged his daughter. "Be a good girl for Theresa."

Unlike his sister, Nat was sitting quietly in his bed, and Thomas knelt down beside his son, and ruffled his dark hair. "You too, Nat."

"Dada." Nat now held out his arms, as his sister had.

Thomas experienced a bittersweet moment as he hugged his son. Nat had been diagnosed with severe learning difficulties at the age of three, and it had soon become apparent that he wouldn't ever be able to deal with the everyday things that people took for granted, let alone be capable of running the Seville Corporation, forcing Thomas to change his heir to his eldest daughter. "Daddy loves his big boy."

"Love you, Dada." Nat beamed at his father as Thomas released him.

Maddie hated not being the center of attention, and she made sure that Thomas had to focus his attention on her again. "I love you too, Daddy."

"And I love you, Mads." Thomas kissed Maddie on the cheek and left the room. After checking on his youngest daughter, who was already sleeping, Thomas headed back downstairs.

Regulus was still waiting for him. "I take it everything's okay."

Thomas confirmed that it was. "Yes. Theresa said Mione had mentioned something about going to see Hermione Sebastian." He smiled as he guessed at the reason the ring must have been triggered. "Mione probably saw a spider or something similar. It wouldn't be the first time my ring has gone off for that reason."

Regulus prepared to apparate out. "Are you coming back?"

"I..." Thomas didn't finish his sentence; instead he vanished.

Regulus knew that Thomas' ring must have begun vibrating again for him to disappear so abruptly once more, and unsure of what to do, he decided to remain where he was. If there was a problem, Regulus knew that Thomas would prefer he remain at the house to protect Thomas' children.

Castrum House

While Thomas was busy with their children, if Mione hadn't been in a fog created by the Imperius curse, she would have recognized the apparition room she was now standing in from Cammie's memory of leaving Castrum House with Harry Potter.

H.J. barked out an order. "Open the doors, and walk in front of me."

Mione reached forward and pushed. At the sight of the pair, one of the Death Eaters Harry had seen earlier, stepped forward. "Is she for sharing?"

"No." While H.J. believed Mione guilty of aiding Thomas, he wasn't about to let her fall prey to a Death Eater's sexual whims. "Where's Dominus?"

"Upstairs but you can't go up there." The Death Eater warned H.J.

With H.J.'s concentration focused on the Death Eater, the spell H.J. had cast on Mione began to waver and, as she became aware of it, Mione finally started to struggle against it.

"As I believe I have something he'll want, I think I can." H.J. forced Mione to walk by shoving his wand in her neck as he felt the spell starting to fail, despite his best efforts to maintain it. "Fucking walk or I swear I'll make you."

The Death Eater stepped aside, believing that Mione was to be entertainment for Dominus and the Inner Circle. "Pity. She's a hot one."

"Trust me." H.J. responded as he reached the doors, shoving something small into Mione's pocket. "Dominus would kill you slowly and painfully if you messed with this one." He then maneuvered them towards the staircase.

Just before they reached the top of the stairs, Mione finally overcame the spell, and terror overwhelmed her as she kicked out at H.J. as she tried to get free. "Get off me. Get off me."

"Silencio." H.J. didn't want anyone to alert anyone that they were coming.

He realized that that hope had gone when a gold-masked man appeared at the top of the stairs in front of them. "Let go of her."

"I don't think so. Keep walking, or I'll splatter her remains all over this hallway." H.J. dug his wand deeper into Mione's neck as he made the demand.

Thomas had little choice but to do as H.J. said. "Very well, but don't hurt her."

When they reached the end of the corridor, H.J. nodded towards the doors behind Thomas, knowing from his daughter's memories that Dominus' rooms were beyond them. "Get in there. And don't make any sudden moves or she dies."

Thomas hesitated. "You really have no idea what a mistake you're making."

"I know exactly what I'm doing." H.J. snarled. "Now keep your hands where I can see them, and get the fuck in there."

Thomas fumbled the handle deliberately to let those inside know someone was coming in; something that would never happen without someone knocking first, before opening the doors and stepping inside the room. "I did warn you."

H.J. found himself facing nine masked individuals with their wands drawn. "Lower the wands or I swear I'll kill her." When no-one did as H.J. had demanded, he began to speak again. "Avada..."

"Do as he says." Thomas barked out; his main concern being his terrified wife. "They've done as you demanded. Now let her go."

H.J. had no intention of releasing Mione until he'd gotten what he'd come for. "I don't think so. Now take off the mask, Dominus. I want to see your face when I'm talking to you."

Thomas did as he was ordered; tears beginning to stream down Mione's face as she finally understood why her attacker was using her as a hostage, and why Dominus simply hadn't killed them both, and all the fight went out of her. Thomas decided to try and discover who was holding his wife. "You have me at a disadvantage. I..."

"You're damn right I do." H.J. interrupted Thomas as he placed his back against the wall, Mione still held in front of him. "I also want your Inner Circle to take off their masks, and to place their wands in the middle of the floor." When nobody moved, H.J. dug his wand harder in Mione's neck, her mouth opening in a silent cry at the pain. "I said now."

"You do realize that you won't get out of here alive, don't you?" Thomas asked as the Inner Circle began to remove their masks.

"We'll see about that." H.J.'s response was a little distracted, as he finally laid eyes on his daughter's face for the first time in four years.

Unmasked, Cammie pleaded for her aunt. "Please let her go. You're frightening her."

H.J. denied his daughter's request. "That's not going to happen. Now shut up and lie down on the floor. All of you, except for Seville."

Cammie didn't move, still trying to reason with the masked individual. "I'll lie down but don't hurt her. She has nothing to do with this."

H.J. wondered why his daughter wasn't doing as he was telling her. "I don't give a shit whether she has or not. Now lie down." H.J. continued to hold Mione tightly as he addressed the apprentices. "You five as well. Take off your masks and throw your wands to the floor, and if I even hear the first syllable of the killing curse, I guarantee that my Reducto spell will have the same effect on her."

Thomas remained standing as the Inner Circle and the apprentices did as they were told. "What exactly do you want?"

"I'll do the talking for the time being." H.J. wasn't going to let Thomas dictate where the conversation went. "Now slowly pick up your wand. And don't forget I won't hesitate to kill her if you fuck with me."

Thomas knew that no matter how fast he knew he was, the masked man in front of him would be able to kill Mione before he got the chance to take him out. "Now what?"

H.J. wished he could order Thomas to kill himself but the oath he'd sworn not to harm Thomas prevented him from doing so. "If you don't want her to die, you're going to swear an oath that you'll lower the wards surrounding this house to allow anyone in this room without a Dark Mark to leave. I also want you to swear that you'll release anyone here from their oaths and remove their Dark Marks if they want that. By the way this oath is to include me."

"How do I know that you won't hurt my wife if I do as you say?" Thomas had never seen Mione look so frightened before, not even when he'd previously revealed he was Voldemort.

"You don't." H.J. knew that he held all the cards. "Now fucking do it."

Gritting his teeth, Thomas made the oaths. H.J. felt a sliver of satisfaction at the pain he knew the man was feeling. H.J. then addressed the Inner Circle, and the apprentices who were huddled together on the floor. "If anyone here wants out, get up."

Before anyone could respond, a knock sounded on the door and moments later it swung open. Unsure of how many Death Eaters

were about to come through the door, H.J. didn't hesitate, firing a Reducto spell at whoever had opened it.

On the floor, Lily realized who'd just opened the door, and she screamed out. "No."

H.J. didn't get a chance to see who'd he'd just hit and had to focus his attention in front of him when, taking advantage of the distraction, Theo Nott rolled over and grabbed a wand, aiming it at H.J. and Mione. "Reduc..."

Having just sworn an oath that H.J. could leave the room unharmed, Thomas didn't hesitate and killed Nott before the spell had even finished leaving his mouth.

On the ground, at the same time that Nott began to attack, Lily saw her son fall in the doorway when H.J.'s spell hit him. Uncaring of what it would mean to Thomas, Lily's only thought was on killing the man who'd just killed her son. Transforming into her animagus form, she darted at H.J. as Thomas again aimed his wand at one of his own, but H.J. beat him to it, and a second Reducto spell flew out of the end of his wand, subjecting the group lying on the floor to a shower of blood and viscus, as H.J. blew the snake to pieces. Outside the room, voices could be heard getting closer, and H.J. aimed his wand at the door locking it. He then snapped at Thomas. "What part of I'll kill her if you don't co-operate, don't you and this scum understand?"

Thomas dropped his wand, and held up his hands. "Please, don't hurt her. We both know it's me you want. My wife didn't even know the truth about me until this evening, let alone be a part of this."

H.J. released the silencing spell from Mione. "Is it true?"

Scared out of her wits, Mione found herself unable to speak.

H.J. ground the wand even deeper into her neck, and screamed at her. "Is it true?"

"Yes." A tiny whisper came from Mione's lips before she continued crying.

"I don't believe you." H.J. couldn't let himself think any differently, and he turned his attention to the real reason he'd come to confront Thomas. "If anyone here wishes to leave, please get up now." No-one moved. H.J. wanted to scream at his daughter to do so but couldn't without giving himself away, and he realized that when she didn't get attempt to get up, that she was finally lost to him. "So be it. As none of you want the opportunity, then you'll die eventually along with him." H.J. gave Thomas an order. "Drop the wards."

Thomas touched his ring. "It's been done."

H.J. had already taken measures to make sure that despite his oath, Thomas still couldn't double-cross him. "You should know that there's a portkey in your wife's pocket, which will activate the moment I let go of her. If the wards aren't down properly, she'll be torn apart by them since no-one with a Dark Mark is going to be touching her to ensure her safety."

Mione experienced a further surge of fear at the ruthlessness of the man who was holding her. "Please don't hurt me. I've never done anything to you."

H.J. was beginning to wonder if he'd been wrong about Mione, but he was now on a path he couldn't get off until he'd completed his journey. "It all depends on your husband there. If he does as I tell him to, then I'll let you live." H.J. then pushed Mione forward towards Thomas. "Free me from my oath."

Thomas placed his wand against his own heart, and did as he'd been ordered. "From this moment onwards, I, Dominus release you from your oath to serve me, to protect me, to die for me, and not to raise arms against me."

H.J. winced as white light washed over him. He then rolled up his sleeve, and pushed Mione to the floor, lowering himself to his knees, keeping one firmly wedged in the small of her back. "Remove my Dark Mark."

Thomas touched his wand to H.J.'s arm, and H.J. found himself hard pushed to keep his wand aimed at Mione as he screamed in pain. Soon it was over, and he felt as if a weight had been lifted from him. H.J. then told Thomas what was going to happen next. "I' m now going to release your wife, and apparate out."

"Where will she be?" Thomas wanted nothing more than to hold his still weeping and terrified wife.

"Somewhere safe." H.J. finally released Mione, the portkey he'd placed in her pocket at the bottom of the staircase, carrying Mione to the safety of the Ministry. Taking a deep breath and one last look at his daughter, H.J. also vanished, first apparating to Diagon Alley, then to Manchester, and finally a few minutes later, after he'd made sure he wasn't being followed, home.

Potter Place

Nerves made Hermione raise her wand at the white-masked man who appeared in the hallway. "Who are you?"

H.J. removed his mask. "It's just me."

Hermione threw herself onto him. "I've been worried sick. Where have you been, H.J.?"

"I'm sorry if I upset you." H.J. said apologetically.

"I don't know where you went but Harry risked his own life checking Castrum House, and now he, Remus, Cassandra, and Sirius are all out looking for you." Now that her initial fright was over, Hermione was angry, as she tapped the ring Harry had given her. "That will let Harry know you're alright."

"Why did you have Harry go searching for me?" H.J. asked.

"Because Harry turned up and I said I thought he'd got a meeting with you." Hermione began to explain. "When he said he hadn't, I became worried."

H.J. tried to placate his wife. "You don't have to be worried. I'm safe and"

Cracks sounded behind H.J., and he knew that it would be the people Hermione had just mentioned were looking for him.

As H.J. turned, he found Harry looking at him with a furious look on his face. "You did it, didn't you?"

H.J. didn't get a chance to answer as Harry's fist connected with nose, breaking it, and H.J. was sent flying through the air, crying out as the wall stopped his flight.

Cassandra grabbed Harry's arm to stop him from going after H.J. "No, Harry. You could kill him."

Harry's eyes were bright amber, his anger at H.J. evident, but he didn't attempt to pull free from his wife's grasp, aware that he'd hurt her if he tried to do so. Instead he glared at H.J. "You stupid fucking bastard."

H.J. wiped his painful and bloody nose. "What's your problem?"

"Mione is my problem." Harry snarled. "I've just come from the Death Chamber where I thankfully stopped her from walking into the Propylaeum."

H.J. paled. "What?"

Harry went to move forward, but Cassandra's hand continued to restrain him. "I don't yet know exactly what happened but when I left, Mione was babbling about a Death Eater taking her to Castrum House, Thomas being Dominus, and that she didn't want to hurt anymore. Given the timing of Mione's appearance at the Ministry, and Hermione alerting me to the fact that you're back here, it didn't take a genius to put two and two together." Harry's lip curled in disgust. "If you'd done as you'd been ordered to, and stayed away from Mione, you'd have learnt today that not only did I find out that Thomas is indeed Dominus, but that Mione, as I repeatedly tried to tell you, had no idea of that fact."

H.J. was hit by a massive wave of guilt, as he remembered his daughter, Thomas and Mione all claim the very same thing. "Harry, I swear I believed she knew that Thomas was Dominus."

"You didn't even know for sure that Thomas was Dominus." Harry snarled at him.

"I just knew it had to be him after learning about Anna's deduction." H.J. had believed Anna's supposition entirely.

"But she could be so very wrong." Harry couldn't believe H.J.'s arrogance. "And you could have made a bad situation even worse than it already was. You could have signed both your and Mione's death warrants if Thomas hadn't been Dominus."

"But he was." H.J. wasn't going to back down, still believing he'd done the right thing.

Hermione was also quickly putting two and two together and coming up with four. "You used Mione to get into Castrum House?" When H.J. confirmed her question, Hermione couldn't help but ask why.

H.J. explained. "When I found out that Thomas was Dominus, I wanted to kill him for what he'd done to our daughter, but I couldn't. So instead I decided to try and take back what he'd stolen, and I decided that this was the only way."

"So where is she?" Harry swept his arms around to encompass the area. "Where is Cammie, H.J.?"

"I offered her the chance to leave, and she refused it." H.J. had to admit that Cammie hadn't left.

Harry was now beyond furious. "So you risked your own life, as well as Mione's and Cammie's for fucking nothing."

"It wasn't for nothing." H.J. protested. "I know the identities of the Inner Circle as well as their apprentices. They're..." H.J.'s voice died away as he realized something in the nick of time. "I can't tell you."

"So it was for fucking nothing." Harry took several deep intakes of air as he struggled to push against his temper, which was threatening to explode. "As far as I'm concerned, we're finished." Not trusting his temper any longer, Harry vanished, taking Cassandra with him.

Hermione turned a white face to her husband. "How could you have done it to Mione, H.J.?"

H.J. again pleaded that he'd believed in Mione's guilt. "I swear I really thought she knew."

Hermione stared at H.J., barely able to believe that the man she loved had done something so terrible. "I backed you up when you said you believed that Mione knew Thomas had to be Dominus, H.J., because you're my husband. But right now I'm ashamed to call you that."

H.J. reddened under his wife's verbal attack. "She would have needed to know the truth anyway."

"That's no fucking excuse, H.J." Hermione could see that she'd shocked her husband with her language, as she rarely ever raised her voice, let alone swore. "You risked our daughter's life, as well as Mione's."

"I thought I was saving Cammie; that she would leave with me." H.J. was truly devastated that Cammie had remained where she was, and he forced himself to face the truth about his daughter. "But she's obviously embraced what she is."

"I'll never believe that." Hermione still refused to give up on her daughter. "She must have had a good reason to stay. You shouldn't have done it, H.J."

"I had to." H.J. defended his own actions. "I saw a chance to get Cammie out, and I took it."

"It doesn't change the fact that it was the wrong thing to do. I can't even begin to imagine what Mione must have gone through. You not

only kidnapped her against her will, letting her believe you were a Death Eater, but you also took her to that hellhole." Hermione's voice was quiet but judgmental. "She must have been thought she was going to die, and to learn the truth about Thomas like that was no way to find out."

Unable to miss his wife's tone, H.J. continued to defend himself with the same excuse he'd used all night. "I truly believed that Mione knew, Hermione, especially given the fact that the adoption ritual would have revealed she was about to marry Riddle. If you remember, she even told us that she was going to make the potion. When Anna told us about her findings, I truly thought that Mione had deceived us."

Hermione's lip curled up in a manner similar to that of Harry's earlier. "There's only one person I can see who's been deceiving anyone, H.J., and I don't mean Mione, or even Thomas." Hermione stepped over the blood that had dripped onto the floor from her husband's nose. "You can clean yourself up. I'm going to see if Mione needs anything."

Next Chapter: Mione has to deal with what she's learnt, and she makes a momentous decision

Chapter 66: Aftershock

When Harry apparated back to the Ministry with Cassandra, he found Remus rocking Mione on his lap. He immediately left his wife to talk quietly to Sirius. "As we suspected, it was H.J. who took her."

Sirius could see that Remus had overheard what Harry had said from his friend's slight stiffening. "He is in so much trouble."

"I broke his nose." Harry came clean about what he'd done.

"I'm surprised you didn't kill him." Sirius was aware that while Harry did truly love Cassandra, he still cared deeply about Mione.

"I might have done if Cass hadn't been there." Harry hadn't been that angry since he'd learnt about Cassandra's treatment at Starr's hands. "But I shouldn't have hit him."

"Under the circumstances, I'm going to let it slide." Sirius had to admit to himself that he'd have done the same thing. "Mione is my biggest concern right now. Obviously I won't be filing charges against her for entering a classified room, as she was barely in control of her faculties, and she'd never have been able to gain access if H.J. hadn't used the emergency portkey in the way he did."

Harry expected H.J. to be in trouble for that as well. "Has Mione told you what happened?"

Sirius hadn't heard her say a thing since she'd been treated. "Healer Bronson gave her a calming potion, after which she fell silent. Despite the potion, I'd say she's suffering from severe shock."

Cassandra couldn't even begin to comprehend how Mione must be feeling. "How could he have done it, Dad?"

"I don't know, Cassie, but I intend to find out." Sirius answered his daughter, as Harry went to kneel down by where Remus had Mione on his lap.

"Mione?" Harry met Remus' worried eyes when Mione didn't respond.

After Harry had tried and failed several times to get Mione to acknowledge him, Remus decided to try a different tactic by using her real first name. "Hermione, it's Remus. I've got you, and you're safe now."

At last Mione reacted to Remus, and looked around as if seeing him for the first time, and she began to shake violently. "He's going to come after me, Remus."

Remus tightened his grip on her. "Mione, he can't get to you here, and we're going to take care of you."

Mione looked up into Remus' face, searching it as if to ascertain that he was telling the truth. "I'm scared, Remus. So scared."

"I'm not going to let anything happen to you." Remus kissed her forehead. "I promise."

"You won't leave me alone?" Mione's face was pitiful.

"I'm not going to leave your side." Remus assured her, tightening his grip on her even more.

Feeling safer, Mione buried her face into Remus' shoulder as shudders continued to wrack her body, but no tears fell.

Harry let out a sigh of relief. He'd been worried that Mione had receded into herself. "Remus, I think we should get her out of here."

Remus stood up, easily lifting Mione with him, cradling her as he would a child. "I'll take her back to my apartment. Sirius, will you come with us? I want to invoke the Fidelius."

Hermione chose that moment to walk in. Harry scowled at the sight of her, and he immediately jumped to the wrong conclusion. "If you've come to plead for H.J., don't waste your breath."

Hermione most definitely hadn't. "I came to see if there was anything I could do to help. What H.J. did to Mione was inexcusable."

Overhearing the conversation, Mione lifted her head from Remus' shoulder, and looked in stunned dismay at Hermione. "H.J. did this?"

Hermione wished she'd not said anything. "I'm so sorry, Mione."

It was too much for Mione on top of everything else, and her voice fell to barely above a whisper. "How could he? I thought I was going to be raped or die, or both." She buried her face back in Remus' shoulder, and overcoming the potion, began to weep.

Remus turned to Anna, who'd been with him when Sirius had turned up looking for H.J. "Do you want to come with us?"

Anna had seen the way Remus had been dealing with Mione, and she refused his offer. "No. You seem to have it under control, and I doubt there's much I could do to help."

"I'll see you on Saturday then." After kissing her lightly on the mouth, Remus walked out of Sirius' office, still cradling the weeping Mione.

Sirius addressed Harry quickly, before following Remus out of the door. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

Once the trio had left, Anna felt a little uncomfortable, and she was about to leave when Hermione stopped her. "I'm sorry if your evening with Remus was spoiled, Anna."

"There's always another time." Anna gave a slightly self-derisory laugh. "Actually, I don't think there will be."

"I'm sorry?" Cassandra didn't get Anna's comment.

Anna wasn't about to explain her comment to a woman that Remus considered his niece. "It doesn't matter."

Harry, however, had guessed at Anna's reason for the comment. "Anna, I think you should wait for Sirius to get back, and see where things stand."

Anna gave Harry a brief, but tight smile. "I'll wait then."

The group fell silent and waited for Sirius to return. When he did, his gaze fell on Hermione, and he had a warning for her. "Remus doesn't want H.J. anywhere near Mione at the moment."

Hermione found that she couldn't even remember where Remus had said he was taking Mione. "I'm not surprised. I'd better head home and see if I can find out anything more from my stupid husband."

"I'll be there later to speak to him as well." Sirius hugged Hermione who subsequently left, before he passed on a message from Remus for Anna. "Remus said that he'll be in touch, and that you can find him at Apartment 1, Watchers' Academy, Hogsmeade if you need him."

"Thanks, Sirius." Anna was about to leave but stopped, wanting to check if she could finally close the door on Bill Weasley and her diminished investigation of him. "Can I take it that after everything that's happened that I'm now permanently off the Weasley case?"

Sirius nodded, his face grim. "I think we can safely say that your hypothesis is the correct one."

Anna knew why Sirius looked so bleak. "You're going to have to arrest Regulus, aren't you?"

"Yes." Sirius had little choice now.

"I'm so sorry." Anna kissed Sirius' cheek, and gave him a brief hug, as they were good friends as well as colleagues.

"If I do need you, can I take it you're going to be based here for a while now that you're seeing Remus?" Sirius made a note on his pad to remind him to finalize things with Gringotts.

"Probably." Anna didn't elaborate further before she said goodnight to Harry and Cassandra, and then headed out of the office and into the hallway where she vanished.

Reappearing in a rose garden, she made her way to her favorite bench, before sitting down to think things over. She and Remus had spent most of the previous two weeks together, and she'd found herself happier than she'd been in a long time. But that had changed when she'd seen the soft, concerned, and love-filled look on Remus' face as he'd held Mione, and she'd known then that he was holding the reason why his previous relationships had failed. "I really know how to pick them."

In the Manor House, Mack Jameson felt the wards ripple, and he told his wife where he was going before apparating out to join his daughter. "You only come here when you're upset."

"Let's just say that I chose the wrong guy again, Dad." Anna remarked in a dry voice.

"So Weasley didn't work out?" Mack took his daughter's hand as he sat next to her.

"I finished with him a long time ago, and I never expected him to work out." Anna couldn't tell Mack the truth about her clandestine relationship with Bill. "I started seeing Remus Lupin."

Mack didn't know him that well, having only met him a few times when Anna had been dating Rupert Giles. "Am I going to have to challenge him to a duel or something for breaking your heart?"

Despite feeling a little down, Anna giggled. "No, Dad. It's only been two weeks. He actually warned me he wasn't ready for a relationship, and I should have listened."

"Then there's not a thing I can really say that's going to make you feel better." Mack told his daughter as he pulled her to her feet. "Come on. Your Mum is still up, and we were about to have some apple crumble and custard."

As a small girl, it had been her favorite dessert, and Anna hugged her Dad. "You've just said the right thing, Dad."

Mack kissed her cheek. "Glad I could help." He apparated back home.

Anna gave her bench a pat. "I knew coming here would be a good idea." She too then vanished.

BritAD

After Anna had left, Sirius turned to the issues they had at hand. "I'm going to haul H.J.'s ass in tomorrow morning at eight. Do you want to sit in on the disciplinary hearing?"

Harry wasn't surprised that H.J. was going to be reprimanded, and despite his words to his brother about their being finished, Harry had no intention of not knowing what was going on firsthand. "I'll be in at seven."

Sirius was still missing a piece of puzzle, and he wasn't going to let Harry leave before he had it. "Before you go, you still haven't explained how you knew for sure that Thomas is Dominus."

"I remembered about Nicole Longbottom. I couldn't believe that I'd forgotten about her and her mysterious Dark Mark." Harry could have kicked himself when he'd finally thought about the French girl who'd married Neville three months earlier.

"What made you think about her now?" Sirius asked, trying to ascertain what had brought Nicole to mind.

Harry explained. "I was reading the Prophet before I left to go home, and I spotted an announcement about Neville taking over from Pomona Sprout in September. It gave some of Neville's background, and mentioned that he'd married Nicole in Paris, and it just hit me that the only times I searched were up until she was attacked there. I could have solved the dilemma about Dominus' real identity weeks ago by checking Nicole's mind for a time I hadn't bothered to check previously."

Sirius made the same connection Harry had. "The only time you didn't check when you searched her mind for a Dark Mark was the time she spent with Thomas and Mione after her parents died, wasn't it?"

Harry acknowledged Sirius' assumption. "Yes, and when I did check, it didn't take me long to find what I was looking for. I was coming to see you when I found I was locked out, and headed for Potter Place instead."

"Do you still have the memory?" Sirius was interested in seeing it.

"Yes, it's in my pensieve." Harry walked out of the office, and returned a few minutes later. "I sent Nicole home with Neville before coming to see you as she was understandably overwrought."

"I'll talk to her later. Right now, I'd like to see the memory." Sirius headed towards the pensieve that Harry had placed on the table, with all three of them entering it.

6th September 2004

Nicole sat out on the balcony watching the waves crash onto the shore below.

Thomas stepped outside and greeted the young woman. "Good morning, Nicole."

As she had the previous morning, Nicole started. "Monsieur Thomas, good morning."

"I see I've startled you again." Thomas placed his newspaper on the table as he sat down. "Have you eaten yet, Nicole?"

"I am not very hungry." Wanting to be polite, Nicole turned her full attention to Thomas, who had just picked up the butter knife. Nicole felt her stomach go over as the sunlight caught the blade.

Thomas raised an eyebrow. "You look worried, my dear."

"A bad memory." Nicole's hand went to her face, as she remembered Dominus threatening to maim her.

Thomas knew exactly what the memory was. "In lieu of food, perhaps you would care for some orange juice?"

"Thank you." Nicole let Thomas pour out a glass of juice.

Thomas handed the glass over to her. "Tell me. What do you think of the view?"

"It is magnificent." Nicole looked back over the ocean. "You are very lucky."

"Yes I am." Thomas couldn't deny it, and, turning the conversation away from himself, he made an observation about Nicole. "I notice that you speak English very well, Nicole."

"Maman..." Nicole faltered for a moment before continuing. "... was English."

"That explains it then." Thomas picked up the newspaper. "Would you mind if I read the newspaper?"

"Of course not, Monsieur." Nicole watched as Thomas turned the pages of the newspaper, seemingly engrossed in what he was reading. But when he placed the paper down to butter yet another slice of toast, she frowned.

Thomas noticed the frown. "What is it?"

"This is going to sound strange but have we met before?" There was something about Thomas' mannerisms that seemed familiar to Nicole.

"What makes you think that?" Thomas asked casually.

"I do not know." Nicole was trying to recall where she could have met Thomas previously. "I am sure it will come to me."

"If it does, then please tell me, as there's nothing worse than not knowing." Thomas smiled as he lifted the newspaper again. Ten minutes later Thomas glanced over at Nicole. "Have you remembered yet?"

Nicole hadn't. "It is gone. Perhaps I saw you on the television or I am remembering a picture of you from a newspaper story."

"Perhaps." Thomas lowered the newspaper. "Occasionally some of the deals I effect end up making front page news together with my picture."

Nicole struggled to remember something she might have read. "I cannot think of any recent deals you have made that I have read about, Monsieur Thomas."

"One of my most recent deals probably won't be making the newspapers, or at least not the truth about it." Thomas placed the newspaper down on the table as he took a mouthful of his tea. "And I doubt it would make very savory reading material for most people anyway."

"From everything I'd read about you, I would have thought that you were above such unpleasant things." Nicole had talked to Remus about Thomas in depth, as Nicole hadn't realized whom Mione was married to until Remus had filled her in.

"Usually I am." Thomas acknowledged. "But unfortunately not all of deals can be made in the boardroom."

"I would not think that they would be, Monsieur." Nicole wasn't stupid; she knew that backhanders were often given out, both in the Muggle and wizarding worlds. "I am studying business at the Grenville Business School in New York, and one of the first things my professor said was something very similar to your statement."

"Is your schooling the reason why you were staying with your Aunt?" Thomas asked.

"Yes." Nicole dropped her head as she battled to hold back her tears when she thought about how her aunt had died. "I occasionally stayed with her at the weekend if I was not too busy."

Thomas gave her a moment to recover, before continuing with his game. "So have you managed to work out where you know me from yet?"

Wiping her eyes, Nicole shook her head. "Unless I am remembering you because of a newspaper article, or a television program, I have not."

Thomas continued to toy with her. "Shall I give you a clue?"

"So we have met before?" Nicole frowned as she still continued to try and work it out.

"We have." Thomas confirmed, before giving her a clue that he knew would enable Nicole to make the correct association. "Quite recently actually; when I was in Paris."

"But I haven't been in Paris recently except for when..." Nicole dropped her juice glass, ignoring the mess as it shattered at her feet.

"Let me finish the sentence for you." Thomas smiled quite nastily. "Except for when you were taken from your Aunt's home to your parents."

"Who are you?" Nicole knocked over her chair as she backed away.

Thomas picked up a clean butter knife and ran a finger down the surface of it. "Does that help?"

Nicole continued to back away. "Mione and Remus told me I would be safe here."

"And if you wish to remain that way, then I suggest you don't back away too much further." Thomas stood up. "That's a very big drop, my dear."

Nicole swung round and blanched, before turning back to find Thomas advancing on her. "Get away from me."

Thomas unholstered his wand. "Petrificus Totalus." He then released Nicole from the neck upwards. "That's better. I wouldn't want you dropping over the edge until I'm ready for you to do so."

Nicole's eyes widened in fear. "What have I ever done to you?"

"Nothing." Thomas owned, before providing the reason he'd revealed his true identity to her. "But it's what your father did. You see Nicole, after I so generously released you, the artifact your father led me to turned out to be a replica of what I'm really looking for. I consider that reneging on our deal."

Nicole immediately jumped to her father's defense. "Papa was an honorable man. He could not have known."

"That's what he said." Thomas sat down on the edge of the table. "And in retrospect, you know, he probably didn't. I mean he sacrificed your mother for something that wasn't the genuine artifact, as well as swearing an oath in order to save you."

"If he had been lying, the oath would have killed him." Nicole screamed at Thomas in French. "And you know it, you bastard."

Being fluent in French, Thomas slapped Nicole for insulting him. "I suggest you refrain from using such language when addressing me, especially while you are five feet from the edge of a cliff, and have no way of freeing yourself."

Nicole wanted to rub her burning cheek but couldn't move her hand. "What do you want, Monsieur?"

"That's more like it." Thomas tapped his wand against Nicole's cheek. "I want you to befriend Cassandra Black."

"Monsieur Black's daughter?" Nicole wondered why Thomas wanted her to become friendly with Cassandra, especially as she knew that Thomas had access to the girl.

"Yes." Thomas could almost see Nicole's brain at work while she tried to work out why he'd made the request. "I'd like for you to ask Remus

to introduce the two of you. While I could simply invite her here, and use her to get the truth out of her father, I'd prefer for my identity to remain hidden. Therefore you are going to befriend her, and I'll simply take her when she's out with you."

"I will not do it." Nicole refused. "You are not going to use her..."

Thomas ended Nicole's sentence as he slapped her across the face again, this time hard enough to draw blood. "I do not think you quite comprehend what a precarious position you are in, my dear."

Nicole raised her eyes to meet Thomas'. "I know what it will mean if I say no. I gave into you once, and I will not do it again."

"Then you are either very brave or very stupid." Thomas remarked. "Now I'd like to think that I'm not an unreasonable man."

Nicole went to open her mouth but closed it as Thomas stared hard at her. "As I was saying, I'm not an unreasonable man. And I am therefore willing to give you a few days to think things over."

"I will tell Remus." Nicole warned.

"No, you won't." Thomas was aware that he held all the cards. "You see, I know all about Remus."

Nicole didn't follow Thomas' thread of conversation. "What do you mean?"

"Surely you know about your brother's affliction." Thomas queried.

"I have no idea what you are talking about." Nicole was still confused.

"I believe you're telling the truth." Thomas sat down on the table. "Your beloved brother is a werewolf, Nicole."

Nicole shook her head. "I do not believe you."

Thomas pulled out a potion from his pocket and set it on the table. "I was going to let you take this but I think I'm in need of it myself."

Thomas turned his wand to his heart. "I swear on my life and my magic that Remus Lupin is a werewolf."

Nicole was hit by a wave of nausea and dismay as white light washed over Thomas before dissipating. "Sacrebleu."

Thomas swallowed the potion before responding. "Exactly. Now where was I. Oh yes, your brother is a werewolf."

Nicole interrupted him. "How do you know?"

Thomas smiled knowingly. "Rupert was good enough to tell me."

"Rupert would never do that." Nicole denied that Rupert would betray Remus to someone like Thomas.

"I'm not swearing another oath, so you'll just have to take my word for it." Thomas elaborated on his comment about Rupert. "Rupert told me about Remus right after he ripped out the memories of another wizard after taking over his body. The man you think is Rupert isn't who he appears to be."

"I do not believe you." Nicole snapped at Thomas, barely able to take in everything Thomas was telling her, and what it meant. "And I will tell Remus. I do not care if he is a werewolf."

"Maybe you don't but there are plenty of people who might." Thomas took a mouthful of his orange juice that he hadn't finished drinking. "Especially after you're murdered by a werewolf."

"Remus would never hurt me." Nicole staunchly defended the brother she had really only just begun to get to know.

"I don't actually need Remus to kill you, any werewolf will do." Thomas took another mouthful of the tart juice before continuing. "But everyone will believe me when I swear that it was Remus who did it. As you so correctly pointed out, I'm a legitimate businessman who is well respected, as is, I grant you, Remus. However, I can prove I'm not a werewolf; I can't say the same for your brother."

"I still will not help you." Nicole's voice, however, had begun to waver.

"Do you know what they'll do to Remus, if you don't agree to help me?" Thomas' voice became harder. "He'll no longer be considered a wizard of good standing; he'll be considered an animal who killed a pretty young girl. And after he's found guilty, he'll be dragged through the streets in chains of silver. Do you have any idea of how painful silver is to a werewolf, Nicole? I could tell you in minute detail." Thomas stood up. "In fact I have a better idea. Mobilicorpus."

Nicole found herself floating indoors in front of Thomas, and into his study. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to share a big secret with you, Nicole. I'm not from this world. And you're going to see exactly what kind of a man I was in my world. Actually, it's what kind of man I still am." Thomas unlocked the wall and withdrew his pensieve before pulling out a memory. He then took Nicole's arm. "In we go."

Nicole didn't know what to expect as she found herself in a room with three men, one masked and the other two, their faces bared. "Remus. But he looks a little different."

"That's because he's not the Remus you know." Thomas began the memory; he didn't tell Nicole which man he was. He assumed quite correctly that she would automatically presume that he was the masked Amicus. "Now watch carefully."

Nicole had to look away as Amicus tortured the other world's Remus before pouring something on his wounds. She wished she could cover her ears as Remus' tortured screams rang out around her. "Stop it. Stop it. Stop it."

"As you wish." Thomas halted the memory. "That substance you see being administered is silver nitrate. To execute a werewolf who has taken a life, it is poured down his throat until he literally burns from the inside out. I can guarantee you, having witnessed it before, it is a gruesome and most painful death."

Nicole dropped her head in defeat. "I will not tell Remus."

"I thought not." Thomas pulled Nicole from the memory, and he slid his spare wand into her hand, turning it so that it touched her heart. "Now I have an oath I want you to swear."

Nicole did as Thomas asked, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Now will you release me?"

Thomas wasn't quite finished with her yet. "I have one more thing I need to do."

Nicole's head snapped back as Thomas aimed his wand at her. "What are you doing?"

"I have a very unique way of marking my followers." Thomas informed her. "And seeing as you've just sworn that oath, that's exactly what you've become. Now tell me, where would you like the Dark Mark?"

"Dark Mark?" Nicole questioned.

"It's a way so that I contact you, it also allows you to apparate to me, and finally it allows me to punish you should be tempted to disobey." Thomas explained. "It isn't very big and, unlike most of my followers, I'm willing to give you a choice of where I'll place it."

Afraid for her brother, Nicole resigned herself to her fate. "I have a birthmark in the crook of my right elbow. You can place it there."

Thomas ripped open Nicole's sleeve to see a small birthmark in the shape of a heart. "That will do nicely."

A few minutes later, Nicole's throat was red raw from screaming, her face blotchy from the tears she'd cried. As she couldn't move, she had been unable to attempt to get away from the pain that invaded her body.

After ending the spell, Thomas walked over to the drawer and pulled out two bottles of potion. "As I said earlier, I'm not an unreasonable man."

Nicole could do little as Thomas tipped the first potion into her mouth. She let out a relieved sigh as some of the pain dissipated. "Why does it still hurt?"

"It will fade eventually." Thomas opened up the second potion. "Now open wide again."

Nicole did as she was told, shuddering at the slightly bitter taste. "What is that?"

"An emotional suppressant." Thomas explained. "I can't have Remus being able to tell you're frightened of me." He then released Nicole, who dropped to her knees.

Thomas crouched down in front of her. "I do hope you enjoy the rest of your stay here, Nicole."

Nicole felt dead inside. "I doubt whether I will enjoy anything again."

"Pity." Thomas didn't really care either way, but he made a pledge to the girl. "Once I have what your father promised me, then I give you my word I'll release you from your oath as I originally agreed with your father."

"How do you intend to stop me from telling someone when you do?" Nicole asked.

"Because I'll be obliterating you." Thomas informed her. "And you should know I'm very good at what I do. You'll just remember what a nice stay you had here, how much you want to be friends with Cassandra Black, and what a kind loving brother you have."

Nicole's upper lip curled in disgust. "How can you live with yourself?"

"Quite easily." Thomas responded in a lighthearted tone. "You see, I like who I am."

"Then you are the probably only person who does." Nicole gasped as Thomas once again backhanded her, knocking her backwards.

"Don't push your luck with me, Nicole. You should be grateful I didn't just drop you off the edge of the cliff." Thomas snapped as he got back to his feet. "But I didn't want to have to explain to my wife why the place she thought was safe, was anything but that."

"She does not know who you are?" Because of what Thomas had just revealed to her, Nicole believed that Mione had known, as she'd been the one to offer the supposedly haven to her.

"No, Nicole, she doesn't." Thomas defended his wife. "Mione offered you a refuge out of the goodness of her heart. It was pure coincidence that you were so fortuitously delivered into my hands."

"How can she not know?" Nicole wiped away the blood that was running down her chin.

"People see only what they want to see." Thomas withdrew his memory from the pensieve as he spoke. "Just like everyone else who surrounds me. Your brother, Sirius Black, Harry Sebastian, just to name a few."

"They will find out eventually." Nicole bit out. "Just as Mione will find out, and I hope that one of them or Mione kills you when they do."

Instead of lashing out as Nicole expected, Thomas laughed instead. "Mione has already found out once, and she had the chance to kill me then, and couldn't do it." He dropped down to his haunches, bringing him face to face with Nicole once more. "You see, Nicole, even after finding out who I was, Mione had to admit that she loved me. And this was before our marriage. So even if she does find out again, I know that she won't kill me, nor will she stop loving me." Thomas got back up. "And I doubt very much whether she'll ever leave our children, so frankly I shouldn't pin your hopes on her helping you or anyone else."

Present time

Harry ended the memory, and the three of them left the pensieve. "There's more but this section was the most important part."

"So Anna was right about Rupert and Bill Weasley." Sirius wasn't looking forward to confirming the truth about Rupert's identity, as well as telling Remus about his brother's betrayal of him. "And while H.J. was wrong about Mione knowing the truth about Thomas' identity, he was definitely right about Mione's feelings for Thomas."

"But unlike Buffy, I doubt she'd ever betray us willingly." Harry continued to defend his former wife as he had against H.J.

Not having seen the memory, Sirius had a pertinent question. "So why did Thomas release Nicole from her oath and remove the Mark?"

"If you remember, while Nicole stayed with them, Maddie had an episode where she began to choke. Being in bed on the other side of the world, Thomas was asleep and didn't get back in time to save her; Nicole did." Harry could see understanding blossoming on Sirius' face.

"Maddie's too young to assume a life debt so wizarding law dictates Thomas assume it, meaning he had to release Nicole from her enforced servitude." Sirius proved that he had indeed figured it out. "As terrible as it sounds, I almost wish that Thomas had gotten back in time. Cassandra might have been taken earlier, and avoided Starr's attentions, and Cammie might have avoided what had happened to her."

Harry put a protective arm around his wife. "While Cass would probably have been taken earlier, we don't know for sure what would have happened, Sirius. And while you're right about Cammie, if she hadn't been taken with Cass, I'd have either died at Lily's hands, or ended up serving Thomas."

"Harry's right, Dad." Cassandra hadn't enjoyed what happened to her, but as Harry pointed out, it could have been worse. "While I regret what has happened to Cammie, at least I'm alive, and Harry's safe as is Nicole."

"And at least we now have the proof we need when we bring Thomas in, and..." Sirius' face fell as Harry and Cassandra exchanged telling glances. "What?"

"Nicole is refusing to testify against Thomas." Harry revealed.

"Why?" Sirius was aware that Nicole's memory wouldn't stand up in testimony if she refused to testify that it was genuine and belonged to her, despite the fact that a memory couldn't be falsified.

"She's terrified of him." Harry wasn't surprised after seeing several of her memories. "And she's also pregnant, and won't do anything she feels might jeopardize the baby."

"And testifying against Thomas would definitely do that." Sirius swore under his breath. "Did you tell her we could place her home under the Fidelius?"

"After learning previously what had happened to H.J.'s parents and my birth father, she was unconvinced, Sirius." Harry half wished they'd never shown the memories to Nicole.

"So with Mione being unable to testify against Thomas under the pureblood laws, unless we can change Nicole's mind, we can't bring him or anyone else in." Sirius hit the table in frustration. "Fuck it."

"Look, there's nothing we can do about it now, Dad." Cassandra felt drained and just wanted to go home. "I'll ask Luna to speak to Nicole to see if she can talk her around. She and Xander should be back from their vacation in Spain now."

"I'll ask James to fill them in." Sirius had a sneaking suspicion that Harry just wanted to be alone with Cassandra. "You should go home with Harry."

He was right, and Harry held out his hand to Sirius. "Goodnight, Sirius."

"Goodnight, Harry. I'll see you at seven." Sirius effectively dismissed Harry as he shook hands with him. "Goodnight, Cassie."

"Night, Dad." Cassandra kissed Sirius before vanishing, Harry right behind her. She'd barely taken a step into the sitting room when Harry pulled her into his arms. She could feel him shaking. "Harry?"

"I just need to hold you, Cass." Harry buried his face in her hair, the events of the evening finally catching up with him.

"I'm here for you, Harry." Cassandra pressed herself more firmly against him, feeling Harry's arms tighten even more when she did so.

As he felt Cassandra trying to get as close as she could, tears filled Harry's eyes as he thought about what his former wife was going through, and about how lucky he was to have found someone like Cassandra who understood. He whispered softly into his current wife's ear. "I love you so much, Cass."

Cassandra barely raised her voice, knowing that Harry would hear her. "And I love you too, Harry."

Harry was aware that most women would have been angry by how upset he'd become on his former wife's behalf, so he found himself even more choked up than he already was by Cassandra's acceptance and unstinting comfort, and he became unable to say anything else. After a few minutes, Cassandra tugged free and grabbed Harry's hand. "Come on, let's take a shower and get into bed."

After they'd showered in silence, Harry let Cassandra lead him into their bedroom, and after climbing under the covers, he held her tightly against him once more. "I don't know what I'd do if I ever lost you, Cass."

"You're a strong person, Harry, and you'd get through it. Just as Mione is going to get through this." Cassandra said softly, hoping that she was right, especially given Mione's earlier reaction to the truth.

"I can only imagine how she's feeling right now." Harry had a fairly good idea though. "It would almost have been better if Thomas had died. She wouldn't have to face such a dilemma then."

Cassandra questioned Harry's statement. "Dilemma?"

Harry stroked Cassandra's hair as he spoke, his voice full of worry. "She loves Thomas as much as I love you, Cass. And what scares me the most is that what Buffy said is right. Even if I knew that you'd done what Thomas done, I'd still want you, and I'd still love you. Just as Buffy couldn't give up Angel and chose him over everyone else, I'd do the same with you. And I don't believe Thomas was lying in Nicole's memory when he said that Mione still loved him even knowing who he was."

Cassandra recognized the validity in what Harry was saying. "You think Mione will go back to him?"

"I don't know." Harry was concerned that Mione would, despite her initial reaction.

Cassandra let her hand drift to Harry's hip. "But you defended her against H.J."

"And I stand by it." Harry could feel his body reacting to Cassandra's light touch. "If Mione had known about Thomas, while she might have stayed with him, she would never have helped him find the Four Pillars, nor would she have allowed Cammie to be held at Castrum House."

"How do you know that?" Cassandra shivered as Harry's hand moved from her hair to trace her spine.

"Because if I was in her situation, while I would have stayed with you..." Harry stopped to kiss Cassandra before continuing. "...I'd have tried to change you, not worked with you. I might have lied for you, but I would never have done anything to hurt anyone else."

"Well we can safely say that Mione definitely didn't know." Cassandra thought about how terrible Mione had looked. "She'd never have tried to kill herself otherwise."

"I'm not sure she was actually trying to kill herself." Harry could feel Cassandra's body reacting as he began to caress her. "I think she just wanted to stop the pain."

"Just as you did when she died?" Cassandra relaxed to allow Harry to deepen his caress.

"Yes." Harry ran his thumb over the spot that he knew would make Cassandra would cry out.

She did. "Merlin, Harry."

Harry stilled his hand as he stared into his wife's face, which looked silvery in the moonlight that was spilling into the room. "You do know that as much as I loved Mione, it doesn't compare to how I feel about you, don't you?"

"I know, Harry." In spite of how Harry had reacted during the evening, secure in their relationship, Cassandra had never once doubted how Harry felt about her. Wanting Harry to continue what he'd started, Cassandra pushed against his hand. "Make love to me."

Instead of covering her with his body, as he knew Cassandra expected him to, Harry moved down the bed.

Cassandra cried out as she felt Harry's mouth join his hand, and Harry began to show her how much he loved her.

Castrum House – Several hours earlier

A few minutes after H.J. disappeared, as the door was opened to reveal Harry Potter lying on the ground, Harry groaned and sat up, a surprised Lucius pulling him to his feet. "I thought you were dead."

Harry pulled open his shirt. "Basilisk vest."

Glad to see Harry was alive, and about to brief him on what had happened, Thomas, who'd returned after apparating home and finding Mione wasn't there, decided to show Harry what had

happened instead. Afterwards, he quizzed Harry. "I don't know who did this; do you recognize anything about him?"

Harry had the feeling he knew exactly who it was but denied recognizing him. "Sorry, no. What do you need me to do?"

Thomas took Harry's words at face value. "I have to find out where Mione is. I want you to check Diagon Alley, and then the Ministry. Also check Grimmauld Place and Black's house, just in case she's gone there. You can tell Black or Sebastian that you're looking for Mione if you need to but obviously not why if they don't know."

Harry inclined his head. "I'll be back as soon as I can." He then walked out of the room, before disappearing.

BritAD

Sitting at his desk, Sirius called out when a knock sounded at the door. "Come in."

An Unspeakable entered the room and closed the door behind him before dropping his hood. "We've got a massive problem, Uncle Sirius."

"I know." Sirius was glad to see his godson. "Mione tried to kill herself tonight."

Harry wasn't entirely surprised given the distressed state the woman had been in. "How?"

"She appeared in the Department of Mysteries after H.J. used an emergency portkey to send her there, before entering the Death Chamber where she tried to walk through the Propylaeum. Harry stopped her as we were alerted that someone had tripped the wards in the room, and he apparated directly into it." Sirius began, his intended next words dying away as a knowing look appeared on Harry's face.

From Sirius' statement, Harry had his guess confirmed about who'd taken Mione. "The fucking idiot. I'm going to kill him for what he's done, and I'm not talking about Mione."

Sirius realized that something more than H.J. just taking Mione had happened. "So something went wrong?"

Harry nodded, and opened his cloak to reveal the hole in his shirt and a large scorch mark on his Basilisk vest. "Three guesses who did this."

"Why would H.J. open fire on you?" Sirius couldn't believe how far H.J. gone.

"I surprised him." Harry revealed. "Unfortunately as I ended up in a corridor, I didn't bear witness to exactly what happened at Castrum House, so Mione will have to tell you." Harry couldn't tell Sirius what Thomas had shown him. "I'm trying to find out who took her and where she is."

Sirius knew from Harry's comment that Thomas obviously had no idea that it was H.J. nor where Mione had gone to. "H.J. is bloody lucky Thomas doesn't know it's him otherwise I'm quite sure he'd be dead right now."

"Thomas?" Harry queried Sirius' comment.

"Harry Sebastian confirmed that Dominus is really Thomas." Sirius indicated the pensieve. "Take a look."

Harry watched the memory with his godfather. "He's really not a nice person, is he?"

"No, but I'm sure you already know that." Sirius had to agree with Harry. "The memory is also enough to tell us how Cammie managed to hide her dabbling with the Dark Arts, as it was obviously Thomas who was training her."

"She trusted him. We all did." Harry's voice was full of regret. "I need to speak to H.J., but first I need to report back to Thomas."

"Tell Thomas that you've reported Mione missing, and that she's not anywhere to be found, and I'll meet you back at your home." Sirius apparated out as Harry pulled up his hood and left the office.

When Harry arrived back at Castrum House, he found Thomas was no longer there. Guessing he'd returned home, Harry apparated to Grimmauld Square to find Thomas there with Regulus. "Mione isn't at the Ministry, Grimmauld Place or my house."

Thomas swore. "I thought she'd have gone running to Sebastian."

"She hasn't." Harry realized that he too had no idea where Mione was as Sirius hadn't told him. "H.J. is home with Hermione, and if anything had happened, Harry would have contacted them. When I dropped by the Ministry, Uncle Sirius was alone in his office catching up on paperwork. If Mione had gone to Harry, then I'm quite sure that Uncle Sirius wouldn't still be at work. I've therefore reported her missing and explained that she's been taken."

After Harry's statement, Regulus jumped to the logical conclusion. "So whoever attacked you must still have her."

Thomas threw the scotch glass he was holding at the wall. "I'm going to fucking make whoever took my wife pay for this."

Harry asked what Thomas wanted. "So what do you want me to do?"

Thomas mulled things over. "Monitor things at your home in case Mione goes there, and report back in a couple of hours or if Mione turns up. If she does, make sure she doesn't tell anyone what has happened."

Harry wondered how Thomas expected him to do that, but he bowed anyway and agreed. "Of course." When he arrived home, he found Sirius taking H.J. to task. Harry interrupted them. "I've told him what we agreed."

"Good." Sirius knew that took care of one problem.

"Excuse me, Uncle Sirius." After making his apologies, Harry grabbed H.J.'s arm, dragged him to one side, and threw up a privacy bubble. "By rights I should fucking kill you for what you did tonight. You almost killed me, H.J. I was the Death Eater in the doorway."

H.J. apologized. "I'm sorry. Are you alright?"

"I'm fine thanks to my Basilisk skin vest, but I can't say the same about my mother or Theo Nott." Harry responded sarcastically.

"They knew the risks when they joined." H.J. didn't give a shit about them.

"Mione didn't, and she could have died." Harry pointed out. "And if I hadn't been wearing this vest, so could I. While I survived your Reducto spell, if the one that Nott fired off had hit Mione, Thomas would have let the others torture you beyond anything you can imagine, H.J."

"He said I could leave unhurt." H.J. reminded Harry.

"And if you'd been paying attention, you dumb shit, you'd have noticed he said 'this room'. The moment you were dragged out of that room, the oath would have become null and void." Harry parried.

"But you hadn't even attempted to enter the room when Thomas said that." H.J. couldn't understand how Harry had known.

"I've seen what happened." Harry wanted to rap on H.J.'s skill and say 'hello, is anyone in there?' "And if Thomas ever finds out what you did, he will make the torture he put you through when you masqueraded as me look like a day at the beach. Believe me, I know." Harry had had the misfortune to have to deal with a newly recruited Death Eater who'd been stupid enough to playfully slap Cammie's bottom as she'd helped him up after finishing a show duel. "And just in case you missed it, Thomas didn't release you from your oath not to tell his secrets."

Distracted by his daughter and holding Mione, H.J. had missed it in Castrum House, but back home and once the pressure was off, he'd

realized just in time to stop himself from blurting out the identities of the Inner Circle and their apprentices to his brother. "I'm well aware of that."

"I'm glad you're aware of something." Harry gave H.J. a final look of disgust, before dropping the bubble. "Sorry, Uncle Sirius."

"It's alright." Sirius could tell that Harry had said his piece.

The three men turned as a crack sounded in the hallway and Remus appeared. "We've got a problem. Mione wants to go back to him, Sirius. I'll meet you at Hogwarts' gates."

Sirius turned back to H.J. "My office tomorrow at eight."

Harry wasn't staying behind. "I'm going with you."

The three men then disappeared, leaving H.J. alone with his thoughts.

Next Chapter: What happened between Mione and Remus

Thanks to Skywalkerfan who unwittingly provided me with a title for the chapter in his review, as I'd been struggling to find one.

Chapter 67: A Brave Decision

Two hours earlier

After Sirius had invoked the Fidelius charm with him and headed back to the Ministry, Remus had returned inside his apartment to find Mione where he'd left her, curled up and shivering in a fetal position on the sofa. "Mione?" He grabbed a blanket, and began to lower it onto her.

Unlike her earlier response of clinging to Remus, this time Mione shrank away from him. "Don't touch me. Don't touch me."

"I'm not going to hurt you." Remus let go of the blanket, and dropped to the floor, leaning against the sofa so that he could look into her eyes. Sensing that it wasn't fear that was driving her response, he reached out to pull the blanket up to cover her shoulders.

Mione reacted in the same way again. "Don't touch me."

"Mione, I just want to cover you up." Remus reached out again, and, ignoring her recoil, pulled the blanket over her. "You're shivering." He then took another calming potion out of his pocket. "Please take this."

Mione automatically took the potion and swallowed it, before grasping the blanket against herself. "Please don't look at me."

"You've done nothing wrong, Mione." Remus kept his voice soft and low.

"You've got no idea of what I've done." Mione continued to shiver despite the blanket's warmth and the potion she'd just taken.

Remus placed a hand next to Mione, but didn't attempt to touch her. "I know it can't be anything bad."

Hating herself, Mione gave a bitter laugh. "You don't know anything, Remus."

"I'd like to think that I know you well enough to say that you'd never do anything that couldn't be forgiven." Remus could sense shame coming from Mione.

"What I did last night doesn't deserve to be forgiven." Not giving Remus a chance to say anything, Mione continued. "I degraded myself for him, Remus."

Remus had the feeling that he knew what was coming. "Mione, you don't have to do this to yourself. You don't have to tell me."

Mione ignored him, and wanting to purge herself, started to tell Remus what had happened. "I thought we were simply going to make love but instead he pushed and pushed, refusing to make love to me until... until..." She gave a dry sob as she remembered how she'd acted. "...until I thought I'd lose my mind. When he finally relented and began to make love to me, I clung to him, and told him that I loved him and that I'd do anything for him, if he didn't stop."

Remus smiled gently. "Mione, Thomas wouldn't be the first person to indulge in that type of lovemaking. I've done it myself."

"But you weren't making love with Voldemort." Mione didn't believe that Remus had been in the same situation she had. "You didn't sell your soul to the man who you were sent here to help destroy."

"Mione, you've done nothing of the sort." Remus finally placed a hand on her shoulder.

Mione shrugged it off. "You don't get it, do you?" Her face revealed her anguish as she sat up. "I meant what I said to him last night. I'd have done anything, and I mean anything, as long as he kept making love to me."

Remus was aware that it wasn't true. "Mione, we all say things in the heat of the moment. It's doesn't really mean that you'd do anything for him."

Mione wasn't so sure, and she dropped her head. "I love him, Remus. I know who he is, what he did to my friends and my family, what he's planning to do, and I still love him. I love him so badly it hurts."

"No-one expects you to stop loving him straight away, Mione." Remus moved to sit next to Mione, relieved when she didn't shy away from him. "You wouldn't be human if you did."

"But I shouldn't love him after what he's done." Mione wrapped her arms around her knees. "What kind of a woman am I?"

"Someone who fell for the wrong person." Remus reached out and began to pull her onto his lap.

Tired and despondent, Mione let him. "I don't know what to do, Remus." She leant her head against his shoulder.

Remus stood up, picking Mione up with him. "Whenever Buffy was upset, she usually headed for the bathroom. And while I know it isn't going to make things any better, would you like a bath?"

Mione was aware that she must look awful, and even though she didn't care about her appearance at that moment, the thought of a hot bath was tempting. "You're not afraid I'll try and drown myself?"

"Not at all." His hands full, Remus kicked open his bedroom door. "I think you fled to the Death Chamber because you weren't thinking straight."

Mione had, as Harry had speculated with Cassandra, just wanted the pain of her discovery to go away. "I shouldn't have done it. But when I found myself inside the Ministry, all I could think was that I didn't want to hurt anymore. I'm a terrible person, Remus."

"No, Mione, you're not." Remus carried her into the bathroom and put her down on the countertop.

"I didn't even consider what would happen to my babies." Mione was so ashamed that she couldn't look at Remus, instead looking beyond him. "I was simply going to leave them alone with him."

"That's because in spite of who he is, you know he won't hurt them." Remus began to fill the bath, walked back into his bedroom, and pulled out a pajama top that he lengthened.

"No matter what he's done, I know he won't." Mione stared unseeingly at the wall. "And as much as I hate what I've discovered today, I know that he does love them."

Remus grabbed several towels out of the cupboard. "Mione, do you think he loves you?"

"Yes." Mione whispered as she thought about some of the things Thomas had said to her which at the time had felt reassuring, but now took on a completely different meaning. "As much it frightens me to say it, I'd say he loves me to a point of obsession."

"I know how that feels." Remus decided that now was the time to tell Mione something he'd only shared with Sirius and James before. "Get undressed and get into the bath. We'll talk more when you've finished."

"I don't want you to leave me alone." Mione was afraid to have to face herself if she was left to her own thoughts.

"I'll just be outside the door while you bathe." Remus reassured her. "Get into the bath and I'll bring you a glass of wine."

Mione did as Remus told her and sank beneath the bubbles, calling out once she'd checked that she was covered. "Remus, I'm in the bath."

"Are you decent?" When Mione confirmed that she was, Remus entered and passed over a glass of wine. "I'll wait outside."

"Please stay." Mione pleaded after she took the glass from his hand. "I really don't want to be alone."

"Then I'll stay." Remus sat down on the chair that he'd placed in the bathroom for Buffy months earlier, and still hadn't removed. "Do you want to talk more about Thomas or something else?"

Feeling a little more relaxed as the warm water soothed her, and with an extremely large dose of calming potion inside of her, Mione made a decision. "Thomas. He's going to want me back, Remus."

"He's going to have to find you first." Remus reminded her.

"That's not exactly going to be a problem for him." Mione lifted her left hand out of the water. "My wedding ring is exactly the same as Cammie's, and is tied into the master ring he wears."

Remus had forgotten about the rings that both Cammie and Mione wore. "I know it's hard as it's your wedding ring, but I think you should take it off."

"I can't." Mione tugged at the ring to demonstrate. "Only Thomas can. He said it was in case anyone ever tried to kidnap me or I'm attacked. While that's true, it also means that I can't escape him." She lowered her hand back into the water. "And even if I cut my finger off, the ring would find its way onto another one."

"At the moment the Fidelius will protect you, and the grounds of Hogwarts are warded. He won't be able to track you down unless you step outside of the gates." Remus took a mouthful of his own wine.

Mione also had one other thing in her favor. "Unless he's actively operating my portkey at the moment I'm outside of wards, my ring only alerts him to the fact that something is wrong if I'm frightened, which is what happened tonight."

Remus had avoided mentioning it until Mione brought it up. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Mione nodded her head, the wine and calming potion combining to soothe her and allowing her to be able to talk about what had happened. "A Death Eater, or should I say H.J., appeared at home, and used the Imperius curse on me. He caught me offguard; I

couldn't fight it and he apparated us both to Castrum House, where I eventually managed to throw off the curse. Until then, I didn't feel frightened enough to trigger my ring." Mione didn't realize that she had triggered it earlier. "Dominus, I mean Thomas, appeared in the hallway in front of us, and..." Mione then began to tell Remus exactly what had happened after Thomas had appeared up until H.J. had warned Thomas about the portkey that had been in Mione's pocket. "...I'd never been so frightened in all of my life as when I found out that the portkey would trigger if Thomas hadn't dropped the wards as he told H.J. he had."

"H.J. should have trusted you." Remus was glad that H.J. wasn't around at that moment.

Mione could see that Remus' eyes had become an even brighter amber than usual. "You're angry with him, aren't you?"

"You bet I am." Remus confirmed. "I don't share the type of history he does with you, but I still believed that you didn't know."

"What do you mean?" Mione had no idea that everyone had debated her innocence about whether she was Thomas' accomplice or not.

Remus told her about what had happened at St. Mungo's and the ensuing events. "To H.J. the most damning evidence was the adoption paper. He couldn't believe you hadn't seen it."

Mione wondered what Remus would say with her next words. "I had."

"So what did Thomas do to hide the truth from you?" Remus was aware that she was testing his integrity.

Remus' continuing support of her innocence warmed Mione. "He said he'd spilled potion over it; he showed it to me, and it only revealed my current name, his own and the childrens. I remember being relieved that he hadn't found out who I was. When we adopted Bella, I let him deal with making the potion again as he already knew who I was."

Remus caught a shiver from Mione as she spoke. "You're cold?"

"A little." Mione shivered again. "The bath water is starting to cool down."

"Do you want me to warm it up again?" Remus offered.

Mione shook her head. "I'm starting to wrinkle up, and need to get out."

"I'll be in the bedroom." Remus got up, and closed the door behind him.

Fifteen minutes later, Mione came out, her wineglass in her hand. "Can I have another glass of wine?"

"I'm not sure that's such a good idea with the calming potion." Remus warned her.

"I'd rather be numb right now." Mione held out her glass.

Remus took it, and refilled it. "Come and sit down in the front room."

Mione did as he asked, greedily swallowing the wine, knowing that while wine alone had no effect on her, mixed with the calming potion, it was creating a heady feeling. "Remus, why do you think he married me? Do you think it was to save face?"

"Sorry?" Remus was thrown by the sudden questions.

"He made the potion for the twins' adoption before we were married." Mione wrapped the blanket, which Remus had placed over her earlier, around her. "Unless he truly did accidentally spill potion on the adoption paper, and I now don't believe it was accidental, Thomas had to have known who I was then, and yet he still married me."

"I agree that it wasn't an accidental spill." Remus had had too much contact with Thomas to believe that. "As for your questions, no, I don't believe he married you to save face. He married you because he was in love with you."

"How do you know?" Mione was now starting to question her own belief in Thomas' feelings for her, as her and Remus' discussion brought up things which, up until then, hadn't even crossed her mind.

Remus thought about it for a few moments before giving his answer. "First of all, there were the gifts he left in your bedroom when he first expressed an interest in you. Secondly, think about what he did to Draco Malfoy just for insulting you. And, probably the most convincing piece of evidence, he revealed who he was when your life was threatened. If he truly didn't love you, he'd have let H.J. kill you."

Like Remus, Mione didn't respond for a few moments as she mulled over what Remus had said. "I hate the fact that I'm relieved, Remus."

"Mione, no-one would want to believe that their marriage was a complete sham." Remus remembered what he'd intended to tell Mione earlier. "I know I didn't."

"You were married?" Mione was absolutely stunned.

"Yes." Remus revealed. "But it didn't last long."

"What happened?" Mione asked before realizing that maybe she was being too nosy. "Sorry, I understand if you don't want to talk about it."

"No, I do. I intended to tell you about it earlier but I got sidetracked." Remus got up and grabbed a fresh bottle of wine, opened it, and returned to his seat. After he'd poured them both more wine, he began to tell Mione about what had been the worst chapter of his life at the time. "You know Julia Taverstock, don't you?"

"Steven's wife?" Mione had met the leggy blonde quite a few times, and was on friendly terms with her husband, who was one of the few watchers at the Council who'd survived the attack by the First.

"Yes." Remus shifted his position so that Mione could lean against him. "Well, she was my wife before she was Steven's."

Mione, who'd just made herself comfortable against Remus, sat back up. "I'd never have guessed it from how the two of you act around each other."

"The passage of time made it easier for me to be around her." Remus was about to tell her though, that it hadn't always been that way.

Mione was glad to have something other than herself to focus on, and she started to question Remus about his marriage. "So how did you meet her?"

"I was twenty-three and met her during a visit to the Council. Julia was a secretary there but she was only seventeen, and I didn't ask her out straightaway because I was concerned about the age difference." Remus let his mind drift back. "However, I couldn't get her out of my mind, and we started dating a few months after we first met. Even though she was a Muggle, I was crazy about her. After dating for a couple of years, I asked her to marry me."

"She obviously said yes, didn't she?" Mione didn't realize she was gripping Remus' arm tightly.

"She did." Remus hid his smile at Mione's intense interest in what he was telling her. "About four months before the wedding I was in a dilemma. Even though she knew I was a wizard, I hadn't told her about my affliction and I didn't want to marry her without being honest."

"Don't tell me, you told her and she told you she didn't care?" Mione guessed.

"Good guess." Remus could still remember how elated he'd been. "Julia told me that she loved me, and that she'd support me, but I found out that wasn't truly the case."

Mione was confused. "So what happened?"

Remus began to tell her. "After she offered her support, we made love, and..."

"Did you mark her?" Mione interrupted.

"No." Remus gave a wry smile. "I should have guessed that she truly didn't love me then, but I was so blindly happy that I didn't give it a second thought."

"So she had to be in love with you as well to be marked?" Mione hadn't really delved much into werewolf mating in the world she was now living in when things between her and Harry hadn't worked out. She did, however, know a great deal about it from her own world, and she couldn't remember reading anything like that.

Remus was aware why she was asking. "I know it's different in your world. But here whomever I mark would have to love me body and soul for me to mark them, and I would have to feel the same way about them."

"So even though you felt that way about her, she didn't feel it about you, did she?" Mione placed a comforting hand on Remus' leg.

Remus acknowledged the gesture by placing his own hand over Mione's for a moment, and then removing it. "She didn't."

Mione also removed her hand, thinking that Remus might not be too comfortable with her hand on his leg. "So why didn't you notice that she didn't feel the same way when you made love?"

"Because I expected her to be shocked, and she was." Remus thought back about the feelings he experienced coming from his then fiancée. "But as I said, I was blindly happy, and I was more focused on my feelings than hers."

"So did your marriage fall apart because she couldn't cope with the truth?" Mione came to the only conclusion she could about why Remus had had a short marriage.

For Remus, what had happened had been far worse than that. "The same day I told her, she left me asleep in bed, and went to Sirius, who by then was an Auror, and told him about me. As you know, I'd have been in serious trouble for not revealing what I was. But she

hadn't bargained on Sirius, who she knew from me was a stickler for the rules, actually circumventing them for once in his life. He obliterated her, and then told me what had happened."

"So why didn't you call the marriage off?" Mione asked softly.

"I should have, but like a fool, I didn't." Remus hadn't been able to. "I simply decided to not to tell her the second time around, and to marry her. I know I shouldn't have but I was so in love with her and I didn't want to lose her."

"So if she didn't know the truth about you, what went wrong?" Mione pulled the blanket over her again as it had slipped off.

"The age old problem. She fell for someone else. Three months after the wedding I came home early from University to find her in our bed with Steven." Remus had thought he was going to die when he'd walked in on the couple.

"And you didn't attack him?" Even though Remus hadn't marked Julia, Mione was still surprised that the werewolf in Remus hadn't reacted.

"I was too stunned." Remus remembered just standing there. "I remained motionless as they both got up, and Julia told me that she didn't love me anymore; that it was over."

"What did you do?" Mione resumed her death grip on Remus' arm, as she waited for him to continue.

Remus explained how humiliatingly far he'd gone in trying to change his wife's mind. "Even though I'd just found her in bed with someone else and she'd told me that she didn't love me, I ended up on my hands and knees and begged her to give me another chance. That I'd do anything if she'd just change her mind. She just shook her head and left with Steven."

"Oh Remus." Mione's voice cracked but the potion prevented her from crying. "I'm so sorry."

"It was a long time ago and I've gotten over it." Remus gave a rueful smile. "But at the time I was so in love with her that when I said I would have done anything if she'd just changed her mind, I think if she'd asked me to kill for her, I'd have considered it."

Mione recognized her own words from earlier. "Even though you knew she was no good for you?"

Remus nodded. "I was obsessed with her, Mione. Even though I knew it was over, I refused to divorce her until she came and told me she was pregnant with Steven's baby. But even then Sirius had to force me to do it. I'm ashamed to admit that I followed her around for weeks even after that."

"What made you stop?" Mione would never have believed that Remus could have acted that way.

"I'd followed her to a Muggle Registry Office. It didn't register with me at first where we were, not until she came back out without her coat on. She was wearing what was obviously a wedding outfit, and she was with Steven and people who had to have been their friends. As I watched rice being showered on her, it felt as if something had died in me. When I looked at how happy she was with him, I wanted to... I thought about..."

Mione touched Remus' face, wanting to wipe away the self-disgust that was etched upon it. "You thought about killing Steven, didn't you?"

Mortified, Remus looked down at his hands before looking up again. "I've never told anyone that before. But I thought about it, yes."

"The most important thing is that you didn't." Mione met Remus' gaze again. "What did you do afterwards?"

Remus had had to resign himself to the fact that he'd lost Julia. "I had to acknowledge what had happened. But it didn't take long for my love turned to hatred as I finally accepted what she'd done to me. However, it took me a long time to get over what she'd done, and to

get through it I turned to a portrait called Frances. She's the one made me realize what a fool I'd been."

"We had a Frances in our world." Mione had liked the portrait. "She used to be on my world's Remus' wall. Like you and your Frances, they were actually good friends."

Remus went red. "We were actually more than good friends."

Mione remembered then that in this Remus' world you could enter a portrait, and become part of it. "So you slept with her?"

Remus acknowledged that he had. "Yes. Until Buffy, Frances was the only real long term relationship I'd had with anyone since Julia."

Mione remembered her very first conversation with Cassandra about Remus. "So you've not slept with any other women apart from Frances and Buffy since you split with Julia?"

"Yes, I have." Remus wasn't entirely surprised that Mione had jumped to the wrong conclusion. "But none of the relationships have lasted that long."

"What about the woman you said you were in love with?" Mione didn't realize she was asking about herself.

Remus answered honestly. "I still am in love with her."

"Who is she, Remus?" Mione hadn't wanted to pry before but given their current discussion, she thought that Remus would tell her now.

"I'd prefer not to say." Remus hoped that Mione wouldn't push the issue.

"So I'd obviously know who she is." Mione deduced, before continuing with her questions about the mystery woman. "So how did you meet her?"

Remus decided that he could at least tell Mione the truth about that. "At Hogwarts. I wanted to ask her out but she was already dating someone. And there was also the fact that she was too young."

Mione was a little shocked at what Remus was insinuating. "She was a pupil?"

"A seventh year." Remus revealed. "After she left and her relationship foundered, I thought about it again but I waited too long and she fell in love with someone else. I sometimes wonder what would have happened if I'd been brave enough to ask her out when I intended to."

"Did she like you at all?" Mione was well aware that being a werewolf, Remus would have known if the mystery woman did.

"I knew that she was attracted to me." Remus had been aware of Mione's crush on him. "But because of what happened with Julia, I let her age influence me, and to be truthful, I think I was almost afraid of being hurt. And ever since I lost her to someone else, I've been in love with her; it's part of the reason why my relationship with Buffy failed. I told her who I was in love with, and in the end she couldn't deal with it."

Mione gave Remus a bittersweet smile. "So neither of us has managed to have a relationship with a person who's been right for them."

Remus disagreed. "Harry was right for you."

"Not truly right." Mione regretted that their relationship had failed but was glad that Harry had found someone to love. "We couldn't make it work when we were reunited in this world. And given what you've said about loving someone body and soul, and the fact that Harry's marked Cassandra, I'd say that he was right for her, not me."

Remus had to admit to Mione's point. "So we're both doomed to love the wrong people it seems."

"What about Anna?" Even in her distressed state, Mione had noticed that Remus had appeared with the woman.

"We've slept together a few times, and we do get along pretty well." Remus admitted, before continuing. "But to be truthful, with everything that's going on now, I don't foresee the relationship lasting very long."

"I almost wish my relationship with Thomas hadn't lasted very long." Mione smiled a little sadly. "I'd have saved myself a lot of heartache."

"It doesn't work like that." Remus told her. "You can't help who you fall in love with. We can both bear witness to that."

"I don't think I'm going to have to worry about anyone falling in love with me ever again." Mione couldn't imagine allowing herself to get involved ever again. "Because no-one's ever going to want me after they find they out who Thomas really is, and I've still got the whole 'I'm not really alive' thing."

Remus stroked her hair. "That's not true, Mione. If someone loves you enough, they'll be willing to overlook both of those things."

Mione gave a bitter laugh. "Would you?"

"Yes, I would." Remus could see that she hadn't really expected an answer to her question. "As would anyone who was in love with you."

Mione sighed, still not realizing that Remus did feel that way about her. "It's a moot point, anyway, as I don't think I could ever feel for anyone else again the same way I feel about Thomas." Mione yawned, exhaustion and the evening's events beginning to take their toll on her.

"Mione, I think you should take some dreamless sleep. The last few hours have been rough on you." Remus got to his feet and held out his hand and, pulling her up, led her towards his bedroom. "Come on, you can take my bed."

Remus pulled back the covers on the bed for her, as Mione stood and waited. "Get in." After tucking Mione in and placing the dreamless sleep on the nightstand, Remus switched off the light and headed for the door.

"Stay with me." Mione's nervous voice cut through the darkness.

Unable to desert her, Remus immediately turned around, kicked off his shoes and climbed onto the bed. "Now take the potion, Mione."

"I don't want it." Mione wasn't fond of the way she felt after taking it. Instead, she wanted to feel the warmth of another person against her, and needing the comfort and reassurance, she asked Remus to provide it. "Remus, will you hold me?"

Remus scooted closer and held up his arm to allow Mione to lie her head on his chest. "At least I don't have to worry about Thomas apparating in here, and jumping to the wrong conclusion this time."

Mione remembered how Harry had found her and Remus together when she'd finished things with him. "It's a good job. Unlike Harry, Thomas would kill you."

"I have a feeling that given who he is, he intends to try and kill me one day anyway." Remus responded.

Mione shivered and tightened her grip around Remus' waist. "He wouldn't if he doesn't suspect that you know the truth about him."

Remus switched the light back on, wanting to see Mione's face. "Mione, you know as well as I do that he's eventually going to figure out who took you, and that's going to bring all of us under the microscope."

Mione fell silent as she pondered what Remus had said. Suddenly she knew what she had to do, and she sat up. "Remus, I have to go back. If I tell Thomas I don't know who took me, he'll believe me."

"I won't let you." Remus had no intention of letting Mione sacrifice herself. "Mione, we're willing to take whatever he throws at us."

"But I'm not willing to stand by and let you die because I chose the wrong person to fall in love with." Mione climbed out of the bed, and hurried into the bathroom, closing the door behind her.

As the door closed, Remus headed out of his bedroom, and out of the front door. When Mione came out of the bathroom, she found the apartment empty. "Remus?"

Getting no answer she wondered if Remus had gone to fetch Harry. She wasn't far wrong, as she hurried across the grounds of Hogwarts intending to leave before he got back, only to find Sirius, Remus and Harry Potter barring her way. "I have to go."

Sirius grabbed Mione's arm and hustled her back inside the Academy and back into Remus' apartment. "You want to go back to him?"

Mione was terrified by what she was planning to do but she was more afraid of what Thomas would do to her friends and loved ones. "If Thomas finds out who took me, he'll hunt H.J., and the rest of you down, and I'm not willing to stand by and let him kill you."

"If that's what you want to do, then I'm going to need several oaths from you." Sirius held out his wand, Mione not having hers.

"Sirius!" Remus turned on his friend as Sirius' words sank in. "She can't go back to him."

Mione disagreed. "Yes, I can." She glanced at Harry Potter as something suddenly occurred to her. "I don't mean to be rude, but why are you here with Sirius, and not Harry?"

"Because Harry has gone home with Cassie, and Harry, here, has been sent to look for you by Thomas." Sirius revealed, as Mione had had no idea that his godson had returned to Thomas.

Aware that Harry Potter had risked everything to escape from Thomas, Mione quickly came to the correct conclusion. "You've become a Death Eater again, and are spying for Sirius, aren't you?"

"He is." Sirius confirmed.

"But why did you return?" Mione wasn't able to work out what had caused Harry to return.

"I was made an offer I couldn't refuse." Harry couldn't elaborate more than that without endangering his own life. "So I went to Harry Sebastian and Uncle Sirius to help me get out, and they proposed I stay instead. After a little negotiation, I agreed to spy on your husband."

"You're not an ordinary Death Eater, are you?" Mione knew that a run-of-the-mill Death Eater would glean little useful information.

"No, I'm not." Harry pulled out his silver mask.

Mione immediately knew who Harry was. "You're the Death Eater who was in the doorway, aren't you? I thought you were dead."

Harry opened up his cloak again to reveal the damage H.J.'s spell had caused. "This saved me. I was just winded."

"So if I go back, I'll have at least one ally." Mione didn't count her niece as she still believed that Cammie had gone willingly to Thomas.

"You might have two." Sirius revealed. "Harry discovered that Cammie only joined Thomas to save him, but unfortunately we're no longer sure if she's trustworthy."

"I'll try and find out." Mione promised. "If I go back, I can ask Thomas to let me see her."

Remus, who'd fallen silent as the discussion flowed around him, made his objections known again. "You can't do this, Mione. You were scared to death when you found out the truth. How are you going to explain to Thomas that you've somehow managed to get over that?"

"Right now, I don't know." Mione had to admit that she hadn't thought far ahead; her only concern being to protect those she knew Thomas

would target. "But I have to go back. Not only will it save H.J. and everyone else, but I may be able to find out more than anyone else can."

Harry backed Mione up. "Mione's right. If she goes back, she can do far more good there than she can hiding out here. I'm already on the inside, and can help her. And since Mione is far closer to Thomas, she has more chance of learning something useful, which might mean that we stand a far better chance of taking him down than we would without Mione's help."

"And how are you going to explain away why she didn't return straight home?" Remus pointed out yet another obstacle.

Mione answered that for him. "H.J. only told Thomas that I was being sent somewhere safe. I'm willing to bet he has no idea I'm here."

Having been given permission by Thomas to discuss the situation, Harry confirmed Mione's supposition. "Thomas believes that whoever took you still has you. You can tell him that the Death Eater who took you eventually let you go, or that you escaped from him."

"I have a better idea." Just before his godson had arrived, Sirius had been informed that two of the prisoners they were holding in the cells at BritAD had been found dead. "Thomas wasn't very pleased about what happened to you. Two Death Eaters we'd apprehended a few weeks ago and were holding at BritAD until their trials were found dead in their cells tonight."

Mione knew that Thomas had killed them. "He got to them through their Dark Marks, didn't he?"

Sirius confirmed her assumption. "Their Dark Marks were scorched. Thomas obviously decided that they might have had something to do with taking you, as they'd been missing for a few weeks."

"But Thomas removed H.J.'s Dark Mark." Mione protested. "So it would be obvious that it wasn't one of them."

"Thomas will believe that he killed only one of them unless we tell him otherwise." Sirius began to outline what he wanted Mione to do.

"You can't do this, Sirius." Remus again interrupted Sirius. "Harry is going to go mad when he finds out."

"I'd rather Harry was angry than dead." Mione argued, as pale faced she turned to Sirius. "So you'll take me back to Thomas and tell him that whoever took me attacked me but you killed him?"

Sirius nodded. "I can get Harry to remove the Dark Mark off Matthew Vickers, so if Thomas really wants to see his body, it will corroborate our story."

"Do you realize what you're asking her to do?" Remus couldn't stand by and let Mione and Sirius do it. "You're sending her back to a monster, Sirius."

Mione put a hand on Remus' arm. "He's not sending me back, Remus. It's my choice."

Remus wanted to shake Mione, to tell her he loved her, to tell her that she couldn't go, but he didn't. "Are you going back because you're still in love with him, or because you don't want us hurt?"

"Both, but I'm not doing this for Thomas; I'm doing this for my friends." Mione couldn't deny her feelings for both Thomas and her friends, and she took a deep breath as she addressed Sirius. "Now what do you need to me make an oath to?"

Sirius began to tell her, only to break off when Remus interrupted in a last ditch attempt to stop Mione from doing what she was going to. "Mione, he already knows who we are and what we're trying to do. He's going to come after us eventually."

"At least if I'm with him, I can plead on your behalf." Mione was going to say more when Remus shook his head, and turned on his heel.

"Excuse me." Knowing that his pleas were going to go unheard, Remus headed into his bedroom, unable to bear it.

Mione went to follow him, only for Harry Potter to stop her. "Leave him be, Mione. He's upset right now."

Mione sighed. "He must know that I'm only doing this because I love him."

"Love him?" Sirius was stunned given Mione's earlier statement that she was still in love with Thomas.

"He's my best friend, Sirius." Mione gave the closed door a sad look. "And if I don't go back now, I might have to end up watching him, and others I love, die because I trusted the wrong person."

"We all did, and you still might have to watch everyone die." Sirius warned.

"And if I do this, I might not." Mione countered. "Now what exactly do you need from me?"

Sirius told her. He then watched as Mione made the vow, the white light washing over her. "You're so lucky that doesn't hurt."

"I think I'd rather it hurt." Mione responded, before looking at Remus' door again. "I need to talk to him before we leave."

Remus had obviously been listening because he came out of the bedroom. "I don't think there's anything to say, Mione. Just be careful and I'll see you in work."

Mione closed the distance between them and slipped her arms around Remus' waist. "Thank you for everything you've done tonight. I really don't know what I'd have done without you."

Remus wrapped his arms around her, pulling her tightly against him. "I wish you'd change your mind."

"I can't." Mione could feel Remus' heartbeat under her ear, and for a moment she let herself relax against him, feeling safe in his arms. She then pulled back. "Thank you."

"We need to go, Remus, if I'm to set things in motion in time." Sirius gave a consolatory smile to his friend, before leaving with Mione and Harry Potter.

Once they arrived back at the Ministry, Sirius handed over yet another calming potion. "Before I let you go, I need you to tell me exactly what happened as Harry can't."

Mione started to recount what had happened at Castrum House but when she reached the part about unmasking the Inner Circle, Sirius was taken aback by a glaring omission. "Regulus wasn't there?"

"Your brother?" Mione's voice reflected her confusion as Sirius nodded in confirmation. "No, he wasn't. Not including Harry, there were four Inner Circle members; Lucius Malfoy, Bill Weasley, Lily and Cammie."

Harry wished he could tell them that Mione was wrong, but his oath prevented him from speaking up.

"I suspected Malfoy but I wasn't sure about Weasley." Sirius couldn't hide his relief about Regulus. "And the apprentices?"

"Ginny and Blaise Zabini, Cedric and Cho Diggory, and Theo Nott." Mione bit her lip. "Thomas killed Nott." She gave Harry a sympathetic look. "I'm sorry about Lily."

"Thank you." Harry had barely given Lily's death a second thought but he knew he'd grieve for his mother later.

"Lily's dead?" Sirius placed a hand on Harry's arm in comfort.

Mione shivered as she recalled how the woman had died. "When Harry tried to enter the room and H.J. opened fire on him, Lily changed into a snake and tried to attack H.J. just as Nott did the same thing. Thomas killed Nott, and H.J. blew Lily to pieces." She then finished her story, but she had a question as to one thing that didn't happen. "Why didn't Cammie leave when H.J. offered her the choice?"

"I really don't know for sure." Harry had his suspicions though. "But I do know that she's in love with a Death Eater."

"Do you know who?" Mione was a little surprised to hear the news.

"Cedric." Sirius filled Mione in, Harry Sebastian having told Sirius about his conversation with Cho and the upshot of what Harry Potter had revealed.

"But he's married." Mione objected.

Harry Potter shrugged. "It doesn't seem to bother Cammie."

"I'm sorry, Harry." Mione knew how much Harry had loved the girl.

"I guess I just wasn't destined to be happy." Harry's face became glum before he pulled himself together. "But enough about that."

Not wanting to make Harry feel even more miserable than he obviously already did, Mione returned to the subject of the Inner Circle members. "So Thomas has made a change then to the number of members of the Inner Circle and their apprentices."

Sirius agreed with Mione. "It would appear to be that way. And we know that Cammie is Carus, Harry is Simus, so Lucius or Rupert must be Amicus."

"Amicus and Rupert?" Mione questioned the names.

"Yes." Sirius revealed to Mione what had happened on the night of the attack on Azkaban, and what they'd discovered about Rupert Giles and Bill Weasley. "The Custodian and Nicole's memory provided us with a great deal of information that we were missing."

Mione had experienced a moment of fear as she discovered firsthand what her husband had done, but she was determined to help her friends, particularly given that it was because of her that Thomas now held all four Pillars. "I'll try and find out what I can. But based on what

you've told me so far, I'd say that Amicus is Rupert. Argentus means silver, and I think it's probably a wordplay on Malfoy's hair."

"I agree." Sirius concurred with Mione's deduction.

Harry was highly frustrated, unable to tell either of them that they'd got it wrong about Amicus. And because of that he knew that once again Sirius was going to dismiss his brother's involvement. He looked at the time. "I'd better get back to Thomas, and tell him that Mione has been found, and that she's here."

Sirius made a snap decision to change his plan. "I have a better idea. You can return Mione with me. In fact, I think I'm going to go as far as suggesting that you say that you were with me when the alarm went off in the safehouse we found Mione in, and came along. You can take credit for Vicker's death. It will cement your place in the Inner Circle even more as I'm sure that it will please Thomas that you saved his wife."

Both Mione and Harry agreed that it was a good idea, Mione wondering how much longer she had before she had to face her husband again. "How long before we leave?"

"I want that potion and alcohol out of your system before we do." Sirius decided that Mione would be better returning in a distraught state. "So, let's say, at least another hour. In the meantime, we'll go over our plan again."

Next Chapter: H.J. has troubles both at work and at home. Mione finds herself alone with Thomas.

Chapter 68: Facing One's Demons

April 17th 2010

Grimmauld Square - 4.30am

Thomas hadn't slept all night; neither had Regulus, who had offered to stay with him. "She has to be out there somewhere."

"Thomas, perhaps you'd do better if you got some sleep." Regulus said gently for the fourth time. "I'll stay up."

"I'll sleep when my wife is safely back with me." Thomas snapped, his hand shaking as he poured himself yet another scotch.

Regulus gave up trying to get him to sleep. "Do you want me to search Diagon Alley again?"

Lucius, Rupert, and the remaining apprentices had been sent out to look for Mione, but all had come back empty-handed. Thomas had barely refrained from using the Cruciatus on all of them, and had told them to get out before he did something he'd later regret. "No, I'd prefer for you to stay here."

Regulus asked what Thomas was planning to do with Mione. "Are you going to obliviate Mione when you find her?"

"I don't know." Thomas got back up onto his feet. "I'd rather she retain the memory of who I really am."

"And if she can't deal with the truth?" Regulus already knew the answer even as he asked the question.

"Then I won't have any choice." Thomas put down his scotch and tried the portkey on his ring again as he had been doing every five or ten minutes but to no avail. Picking up the glass he hurled it into the fireplace. "I'm going to fucking kill whoever took her."

“If you haven’t already.” Regulus had watched as Thomas had used Blaise Zabini’s Dark Mark to destroy two Death Eaters who’d vanished a few weeks earlier. Regulus knew that they’d been held at the Ministry for some time but given what had happened to Mione, Thomas had still presumed that they had something to do with it.

Thomas slumped into his chair, and ran a hand over his face. “I can’t stand this, Reg.”

Regulus knew that it was a mark of how much Thomas truly loved Mione, and how desolated he was by her disappearance, that he was being allowed to see Thomas in such a vulnerable state. “We’ll find her, Thomas.” Regulus got up and put a tentative hand on Thomas’ shoulder. “If she’s not back by morning, I’ll go back out and look for her.”

Thomas almost broke down completely at the comforting touch, and he dropped his head into his hands, and finally asked the question that was haunting him. “What if she’s out there, and doesn’t want to come back?”

Regulus had the feeling that it might come to that, but prudently didn’t voice his concerns. “Thomas, she loves you.”

“I know that.” Thomas wiped his eyes and got back up. “But what if it’s not enough?”

Regulus watched Thomas fingering the master ring he wore. “Try the portkey again.”

Not expecting it to work, Thomas did as Regulus suggested. As before, nothing happened.

Potter Place - 4.45am

H.J. was sitting watching his wife sleep. On her return from BritAD she’d ignored him, and had gone to their room, spelling the door locked behind her. When H.J. had gone to join her, having Potter blood, he’d easily been able to bypass the lock, and let himself in.

Knowing he'd make things worse if Hermione woke up and found him in bed with her, he'd settled himself into a chair and just sat in the darkness staring at his wife's face as the fire that burned in the grate rose and fell. As he sat there, he wondered how many bridges he burnt in his foolhardy attempt to rescue his daughter, and what was going to happen because of him.

Hogwarts - 7am

Neville Longbottom yawned as a knock sounded on the door. "I'll get it."

"Okay." Nicole yelled from the bathroom where she was brushing her teeth to get ready for the day.

Neville tugged open the door to find Xander and Luna standing there. "We didn't exactly expect to see visitors at this time of the morning."

Xander ignored Neville's words and stepped into the couple's rooms without being asked. "It's about Thomas Seville."

Nicole came padding out into the sitting room, her dressing gown belted around her waist. "What about him?" She'd had an awful time the previous afternoon when Harry Sebastian had finally figured out where her memory had been obliterated from, and she'd been hoping to push it to the back of her mind for the time being.

"He's Dominus." Xander hadn't yet found out about Nicole and her memory, as he and Luna had only arrived back less than an hour earlier from a week's vacation in Spain, after having decided to stay an extra night.

"I already know that." Nicole moved to join Neville, feeling comforted by his solid presence.

"But how could you?" Luna closed the door behind her. "James said that he hadn't told you about Mione and what happened to her last night."

"Last night?" Neville had simply brought his wife home after her ordeal at the Ministry, and they hadn't spoken to anyone since then. "What happened?"

"H.J. messed up big time." Xander began, before telling them in detail what had happened. "And now it appears that Mione has gone back to Thomas."

"Is she mad?" Nicole asked, her heart pounding. Even though she only had a shadow of her memories involving Thomas, the news was still enough to alarm her.

"Not exactly." Xander sat down. "But I do know I wouldn't have done it."

During Xander's explanation, Nicole had found herself being tucked onto Neville's lap by her husband, the bulk of his still somewhat chubby body, providing both warmth and comfort. "Neither would I. I cannot believe she has gone back to him."

Neville kissed his wife's cheek. "She's doing it so that we can be safe."

"After what Thomas did to me, I will never feel safe around that man again." Nicole buried her face in Neville's soft shoulder.

Luna and Xander exchanged confused looks, Luna realizing first that Nicole must have finally had the mystery of whether she'd had a Dark Mark or not solved. "He did mark you then?"

Neville confirmed he had. "Harry Sebastian asked us to drop by the Ministry yesterday and..." Neville went on to tell the couple what Harry had figured out. "And it turns out that Thomas did it when Nicole was staying with them on the Island. Also we learned that Mione didn't know the truth, as Harry had tried to tell H.J." Neville had been brought in on what was happening when his relationship with Nicole had become more serious.

“H.J. should have believed her.” Luna had just known that there was no way Mione would have betrayed them like that, just as she still didn't believe that Cammie had left of her own free will. “I'd trust Mione with my life.”

Xander hadn't been so sure he would but he trusted his wife's instincts wholly. “I might not go that far, but if my little angel says I should, then I'd trust her with mine too.”

Luna smiled sweetly at Xander. “You don't have to agree with me, Xander.”

“But you're my little Twinkie.” Xander dropped a kiss on her nose. “And I've been married to you long enough to believe in you. My own beliefs usually lead to me being molested by strange demon women.”

Luna giggled. “How do you know I'm not one, and haven't told you yet?”

“Well, considering what you're like in the bedroom...” Xander's voice trailed off, as he became aware that Neville and Nicole were staring at the pair of them. “Sorry.”

“It is nice to see you love your wife, Xander.” Nicole snuggled deeper into Neville's arm. “Just as much as I love my Neville Bear.”

Neville went red but gamely responded in kind. “And I love my little sunflower.”

Luna sighed dreamily. “I love pet names.”

Xander rolled his eyes but knew that he was probably the biggest offender. “I think we've gotten a little off topic here.”

Watchers' Academy - 7.30am

Remus sat miserably at his kitchen table, his head pounding and a cup of tea in front of him. He ignored the knocking at his door when it

began. When it continued, he finally got up and flung open the door to find James standing here. "What do you want?"

James ignored Remus' hostility and held out a hangover potion. "To give you this."

Snatching it out of James' hand, Remus knocked it back and sighed as the pounding vanished. "I take it Sirius told you."

"Seeing as he's your secret-keeper, there's no-one else who could have." James closed the door. "So when were you going to tell me how you felt about Mione?"

"He told you that as well?" Remus passed over a second mug.

"He didn't have to." James poured tea into the mug before adding a splash of milk. "Mione returns to her husband, and, after spending the evening taking care of her, you're left alone, and proceed to get drunk. Something you only do when you're drinking with Sirius, and he'd returned to BritAD last night, or if you're extremely upset." James stirred his tea. "You did it when Julia betrayed you, and again when she married Steven. You also did it when you lost both of your parents, when you told us Buffy was pregnant with Emily, and when you realized that your relationship with her wasn't going to last. Now unless you're upset because you were hoping for a chance with Thomas if Mione was out of the picture, it doesn't take an evil genius to figure out what has upset you."

"' Evil genius?' You've been watching too many Muggle movies with your wife." Remus remarked, before sighing heavily. "I could simply have been upset because she's my friend, James."

"Yes, you could have but you kind of gave yourself away with your response." James hadn't been entirely sure if he was right until Remus had responded in the way that he had. "Does this mean that you've gotten over Buffy then?"

"I was in love with Mione long before I met Buffy." Remus filled James in on how long he had been fixated with her.

“You didn’t really think that she’d fall out of love with Thomas, and into your arms if she’d stayed, did you?” James asked in a worried voice.

“Hardly.” Remus responded in a wry tone. “I’ve long resigned myself to the fact that I’m screwed as far as Mione is concerned. But just because I can’t have her, it doesn’t mean I wanted her back in the arms of someone we now know is an unprincipled and ruthless killer.”

“She’s doing a very brave thing, Remus.” James had been horrified when Sirius had told him but had understood why Mione was doing it. “I’m not sure if I could do it if I was in her shoes.”

“I just hope it’s worth it.” Remus pushed his tea away. “And that she doesn’t pay the price for it instead of us.”

“We’ll soon find out.” James got up. “Do you want to come over and say hi to Nymy and little James before they leave for the day?”

Remus knew that James was always willing to show off his son, and normally Remus was just as willing to see him. “No thanks. I’m going to shower and then I’m dropping by to see Nicole.”

James let his friend go, knowing that Remus would brood over things for a while but would eventually pull himself together.

Grimmauld Square - 7.45am

As loud cracks sounded in the hallway, Thomas ran out to find Mione being supported by Harry Potter and Sirius Black, the blanket that was wrapped around her shoulders doing little to hide the bruise on her face and a rip in the sleeve of her dress. “Thank goodness.”

Mione could feel her heart beginning to beat faster as Thomas pulled her into his arms, and she began to cry, both from fear and tiredness.

“Darling, you’re safe now.” Thomas dropped kisses over Mione’s head, uncaring that it was dirty, and that he was being observed.

Regulus hadn't expected Harry to be the one to bring Mione home. "Potter, this is quite a surprise. How did you find Mione?"

"An alarm went off in a Ministry safe house when I was with Uncle Sirius, and he took me with him." Harry explained. "When we arrived, Mione was fighting off a man."

Thomas interrupted, as he set Mione aside from him, and gently touched the bruise on her face. "Did he do to this you?"

"I can't tell you." Everyone had to strain to hear what Mione saying as she was crying so hard.

"I think he did. He pulled a wand on me when I told him to let her go." Harry continued explaining. "The duel became full blown and I ended up killing him."

"When was this?" Thomas moved Mione back against his chest, continuing to drop kisses on her head.

"About two hours ago." Harry could see that his answer hadn't pleased Thomas.

Sirius explained the delay. "I had to take her in for questioning but she's refused to say anything. I've had a healer look her over. Apart from the bruise on her face, and one on her arm, she's physically alright. But she's overcome several calming potions."

Thomas wanted to know who'd taken Mione. "So are you going to tell me exactly who did this to my wife?"

"An Auror named Matthew Vickers." Sirius gave the name of the Death Eater who had been an Auror in his division. "But I have no idea though why he targeted Mione. Did you receive any kind of ransom note after she went missing?"

Thomas hadn't, but he went along with Sirius' premise. "You think it was monetarily motivated?"

“Perhaps, but judging by what I think he was about to do to Mione, the only other motivation I can think of is sexual.” Sirius suggested, as he made an observation. “I think that Mione was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“Let’s go into the sitting room.” Thomas cradled Mione against him as he led the way. “Mione, sweetheart, can you tell us what happened?”

“No.” Mione managed to get out.

Thomas turned to Regulus. “Can you get me a calming potion from the left hand drawer of my desk?”

Sirius produced a vial from his pocket. “Here, take this.”

Regulus took it and handed it Thomas, who helped Mione to take it.

Mione began to stop crying, and Thomas wiped her face with his hands. “Do you think you can tell me what happened now?”

Mione shook her head. “I can’t.”

“Can I look?” Thomas asked softly.

After biting her lip, Mione nodded hesitantly. “Okay.”

Thomas withdrew his wand, and aimed it at Mione, stopping when she flinched. “It’s okay, Mione. It won’t hurt. Now try and relax for me. Legilimens.”

After a few moments, Thomas withdrew. “She hasn’t been obliviated but judging from the gap in her memory, she’s been made to swear an oath. Her final memory before being questioned at the Ministry by you, is of Harry standing over a body. The oath obviously failed on Vickers’ death but as to what happened before, only Vickers and my wife know.”

“As I said, the healer said that she’s only bruised, Thomas.” Sirius had been the one to use a spell to inflict the bruise on Mione's face but the one on her arm had occurred from H.J.'s rough handling of her. “Apart from the mental trauma, I'd say that she’s alright.”

“I’m going to take her to the Island.” Thomas had noticed something he hadn't expected when he'd invaded his wife's mind, and he wanted to talk to her in private about it. “Would you do me a favor, and let Remus know that she won’t be in work for at least a week while she recovers? It may be longer.”

“Of course.” Sirius had little choice but to agree. “Is there anything else I can do?”

“No, but thank you for bringing her home.” Thomas got up and shook Sirius’ hand. “I believe my wife owes you and Harry a life debt which I’m happy to assume.”

Sirius couldn’t hide his surprise. “I thought Mione would have to make that decision as your father is head of the Seville family.”

“I don’t want my wife owing anyone anything.” Thomas would rather assume the debt than have Mione beholden to anyone.

Sirius hated doing what he was about to, but Auror rules dictated he do so. “There is no debt, Thomas. I did what I did in the line of duty.”

“And I couldn’t accept a life debt from a friend.” Harry too had to refuse it, aware that Thomas would expect him to do so.

“Then thank you again.” Thomas returned to his wife, and gently pulled her to feet. “If you’ll excuse us.” He stopped to address Regulus before leaving. “Reg, thanks for coming over. I appreciate it. I’ll be in touch. Sirius, Harry.” The two of them then vanished.

Sirius turned to his brother. “Thomas asked you to come over?”

“Thomas wanted a friend he could trust to stay with his children while he dealt with trying to find Mione.” Regulus explained as he yawned widely. “Sorry, but it’s been a long night.”

“Why didn’t he contact Auror Division straightaway, Reg?” Sirius asked.

“He didn’t want news that the wife of a billionaire had gone missing to reach the tabloids, and it might have been a false alarm.” Regulus answered. “Thomas had his own people who were out looking for her.” He smiled wryly. “Not that they’d have found her in a Ministry safe house.”

“Vickers had access to it as part of his position.” Sirius stuck to the story the three of them had agreed to as he explained how Mione had ended up there. “I think he must have forgotten that an alarm is triggered if there’s any form of violence. Looking at Mione’s face, he must have hit her. I’m just glad that we got there when we did.”

"So am I." Regulus yawned again. "I’m sorry, but you’re also going to have to excuse me as well. Goodnight, I mean morning, Sirius, Potter."

Sirius let his brother leave, unwilling to arrest him now that Mione had given him the names of the remainder of the Inner Circle, as well as the apprentices, and his brother hadn’t been included. Also, he didn't want to risk Thomas being alerted to the fact that they knew who he was, and render Mione's sacrifice a waste of time. After glancing at the large Grandfather clock that was keeping time in the hallway, Sirius realized that he was due for his meeting with Harry and H.J. "Harry, I've got to go. I'll see you at the weekend."

Harry shook hands with Sirius before he apparated out after his godfather.

BritAD - 7.55am

Harry Sebastian was furious. "Mione was in no fit state of mind to make that kind of decision, Sirius. And if Thomas finds out what she's done, he'll kill her."

"He's not going to find out." Sirius had expected Harry to respond as he was doing. "Her oath will stop him from learning anything about last night."

"I can't believe Remus let her go." Harry had every intention of having it out with the head of the Council.

"I let her go, not Remus; he's just as angry about it as you are." Sirius defended his friend. "But short of tying Mione up, there was little that anyone could have done to prevent her from leaving."

"Then you should have tied her up." Harry didn't bother to hide how mad he was with his father-in-law.

Sirius leant forward. "Harry, if you'd been in my position, and you knew that someone could do more good by going back into a bad situation rather than by hiding, what would you have done?"

"That's hardly fair." Harry didn't want to answer the question.

Sirius stared expectantly at Harry. "I didn't ask what was fair, Harry. I asked what you'd do."

"I'd send them back." Harry had asked people to do the same when he'd headed BritAD, and in his position in this world's BritAD, and while he'd done it with regret, he was fully cognizant that it was a necessary evil. "But I wish there could have been another way."

Sirius let out a lengthy sigh. "There wasn't, Harry, and if I hadn't have intervened, Mione would have gone back without the protection of an oath, and it wouldn't have taken Thomas very long to figure out who took her, and her sacrifice would have been worthless."

A knock sounded at the door. Aware of who was it, Harry moved his chair around to the other side of the desk, and joined Sirius facing the door. "Do you want me to take this?"

Sirius decided that he would. "Don't forget though. You can punish him in any way you see fit except for sacking him. I don't want him running off again on some foolhardy attempt to kill Thomas on his own."

Harry acknowledged Sirius' words and called out. "Come in."

It was obvious that H.J. hadn't slept well, if at all, as he limped heavily into the room and dejectedly closed the door behind him.

Harry nodded to the chair in front of the desk. "Sit down, Sebastian."

H.J. ignored Harry's request and handed over a sheet of parchment. "I thought I'd save you the trouble of sacking me. That's my resignation."

Harry ignored it. "I said sit down, Sebastian."

Still standing, even though it was painful to do so, H.J. looked incredulously at his brother. "Harry, why bother? We both know that you'll dress me down before sacking me."

Rising to his feet, Harry placed his hands on Sirius' desk and leant forward. "Use the chair, Sebastian, before I come round there and make you."

Giving in, H.J. dropped onto the hard, straight-backed chair. "Get on with it then."

Harry remained standing. "Auror Sebastian, in taking action against Dominus you not only disobeyed a direct order, but you also jeopardized your own life as well as the lives of others. As an Auror you are charged with defending others, not threatening them, not risking their lives, and certainly not using them in your own misguided schemes. Before I make any final decision as to your punishment, do you have anything you wish to say in defense of your actions?"

“Just that I believed I was doing the right thing.” H.J. had no other defense.

Harry slowly shook his head in disgust. “It may have been the right thing for you personally, but it was far from that for Mione Seville.”

“I truly thought she knew.” H.J. reiterated what he'd said the previous night. “I can only apologize to her if she'll let me.”

“I'll ask her when I next see her.” Harry responded.

Pretty well attuned to Harry's moods, H.J.'s eyes' narrowed. “Where is she, Harry?”

“That's none of your business, Sebastian.” Harry wasn't about to tell H.J. that Mione had returned to Thomas until he had to. “And I'd appreciate it if you'd address me as either ‘Auror Sebastian’ or ‘Sir’ during the course of this disciplinary hearing.”

H.J. backed off. “Yes, Sir.”

Harry finally sat back down. “As well as the charges relating to the incursion of Castrum House, there's also one other charge of using an authorized Ministry portkey for other than its intended purpose. Without it, Mione Seville would have been unable to access a room that she would otherwise have needed level one clearance to enter.”

The portkey had been H.J.'s and it was supposed to have been for his personal use in case of an emergency. “Again, I'm sorry, Sir.”

“Noted.” Harry then turned to Sirius, and addressed him formally. “Do you have anything you wish to add, Sir?”

Sirius had, particularly given H.J.'s attitude. “I'd like a charge of insubordination added to the record.” He folded his hands as he addressed H.J. “While I understand that you're upset with Auror Sebastian, you've failed to show him the respect his position affords him, and, I believe, he deserves.”

“Yes, Sir.” H.J. didn’t see any point in apologizing again.

After Sirius told him to carry on, Harry got to the crux of the hearing. “Auror Sebastian, while you would normally be dismissed for your actions against the Ministry, and be charged with breaking and entering, kidnapping, manslaughter, and the illegal use of a portkey, after careful consideration, and after taking in Mrs. Seville’s wish to drop all charges against you...”

H.J. interrupted him. “Mione isn’t pressing charges?”

“I believe that’s what I just said.” Harry snapped irritably. “So unless you’ve got anything of import you wish to add, perhaps I could continue?”

“I don’t, Sir.” H.J., like many others before him when dealing with Harry, wished that he’d never taken up an Auror position as he faced off against his stone-faced brother. “You can continue.”

“You’re too kind.” Harry’s voice dripped with sarcasm. “It has been decided that you will be docked six months’ pay. And, effective immediately, in addition to your teaching duties, you will also spend two months on cleaning duty, followed by two months on night duty. Should anyone have reason to complain about you again within the next two years, there will be no further hearing and you will be instantly dismissed, and the charges I’ve already outlined will be reinstated. Do you understand?”

It was only as he found out that he wasn’t to be sacked, that H.J. realized the severity of what he’d done, and that he’d dodged a sizable bullet that could have led to his incarceration in New Azkaban. “Yes, Sir.”

“Good. Now get out of my sight.” Harry made it clear that while Mione may have been forgiving, he still didn’t want to see H.J.

Aware that Harry was still too angry to reason with, and not wanting to jeopardize his position again, H.J. headed back to Potter Place to see if Hermione had calmed down yet.

She hadn't, and was actually packing a suitcase when H.J. limped into their bedroom. "Where are you going?"

"To stay with Luna for a while." Hermione didn't look at H.J. while she closed the case up. "I'm taking Sevvv with me."

"When will you be back?" H.J. asked in a strained voice.

Hermione finally turned around. "I don't know."

"I thought I was doing the right thing." H.J. hobbled over to where Hermione was standing.

"This isn't about that." Hermione picked the case up. "It's about the fact that you didn't trust me enough to tell me what you were going to do."

"You'd have told Sirius if I had." H.J. responded.

Hermione shook her head. "No, I wouldn't. I would have tried to make you see reason instead. And if you could have given me just cause why you were planning to do what you did, then I would have supported you."

"There's no way you would have supported me treating Mione in the way I did." H.J. countered.

"No, I wouldn't have." Hermione was willing to admit H.J.'s argument to be true. "But you didn't trust me enough to even contemplate that I might have."

H.J. couldn't deny it. "I'm sorry, Hermione."

"So am I, H.J." Hermione picked up her case, and started to walk towards the door.

Watching her walk away, H.J. was suddenly hit by a wave of panic, and he blurted out what was frightening him most. "Are you ending our marriage?"

Her hand on the door handle, Hermione turned around. "No. I love you, H.J. but right now I'm hurt and disappointed, and I need some time alone."

H.J. sank onto the bed, his legs shaking with relief. "I love you too, Hermione."

Not having anything else to say, Hermione opened the door and left.

The Island - 7.50am

As soon as the portkey deposited them on the Island, Mione pulled free of Thomas' grasp. "What are you going to do to me?"

"I'm certainly not going to hurt you, Mione." Thomas unholstered both of his wands and placed them on the table. "See, I'm going to disarm myself."

Mione was relieved as Thomas walked away from his wands. "So what happens now?"

"We talk." Thomas didn't try and touch her again as he sat down on the sofa in his sitting room. Seeing Mione was still shaking, he made a suggestion. "Do you want me to light a fire?"

"No. I'll do it." Not wanting Thomas to have a wand in his hand, Mione picked one up, running her fingers down it as she shakily lit a fire. "This isn't the wand you used to own." She glanced at the remaining wand on the table. "Neither is that one."

"My original wand is locked in the wall." Thomas told her. "I actually prefer the wand you're holding. It was custom made for me."

“I’m going to need some new wands.” Mione found herself saying as she returned to stand by the table after lighting a fire.

“I’ll get you some replacements.” Thomas could see that Mione was reluctant to release the wand she was holding. “You can keep hold of the wand, or take custody of both of them, if it makes you feel safer.”

“It does.” Mione didn’t bother to hide her nervousness, and picked up the second wand, before slipping them both into her empty holster.

“Come and sit down.” Thomas patted the sofa beside him.

Mione sat down in the chair opposite instead. “I’m fine here.”

Thomas wasn't surprised by his wife's reluctance to be near him. “I’m sorry about what happened to you.”

"How did he find out who you are?" Mione wanted to see if Thomas had any idea that he'd been lied to.

He hadn't. “I don’t know how Vickers found out but I think he attacked you because I punished him for failing in a duel against Cammie.” Thomas guessed. “I can’t think of any other reason.”

“I noticed she's a member of your Inner Circle.” Not aware of Harry Potter’s discovery, Mione quizzed Thomas about her niece. "Why did she join you?"

"I forced her to." Thomas didn’t bother to try and hide the truth. “I used Harry Potter and her use of the Dark Arts against her.”

“But Harry left you.” Mione didn’t follow how Harry could have been used against Cammie.

“He rejoined at my behest.” Thomas went further. “And he’s now proved himself beyond a doubt as he’s also a member of my Inner Circle.”

Mione acted as if she was beyond surprised. “But he betrayed you.”

“And he’s more than made up for it.” Thomas decided it probably was best not to tell Mione how far Harry had gone to do so, and he returned to the subject of the man he believed had taken his wife. “Mione, do you know why Vickers took you? Even though I suspect it’s because of what I did, I’d like to know for certain why.”

“I’ve got absolutely no idea why.” Mione responded. “But even if I did, I couldn’t tell you.”

“I guessed that from your memory.” Thomas’ tone was wry as he moved onto the subject he most wanted to talk to his wife about. “Mione, I know you had to swear an oath to Vickers, which was obviously to protect his identity but I was freely able to access your memory of what happened at Castrum House. This means that you were able to speak unreservedly about it. So why didn’t you tell Sirius who I was?”

Mione dropped her head, afraid to meet Thomas’ eyes unless he figured out she was lying. “I wanted to but I just couldn’t.”

“Why not, Mione?” Thomas got up and knelt down at his wife’s feet, taking her hand.

“I was afraid.” Now Mione wasn’t entirely lying.

“Afraid of me?” Thomas kissed her fingertips. “You really don’t have to be.”

“That wasn’t what I was afraid of.” Mione whispered.

Thomas used his free hand to gently lift Mione’s chin up so that he could look at her. “So what were you afraid of, Mione?”

Mione answered the question with a partial truth. “Of never seeing you again if I told Sirius and he arrested you, and I was afraid of what you’d do to my friends if things went wrong.”

“I can’t say that I won’t ever hurt them, Mione, but I won’t actively seek to move against them, not unless they attack me first.” Thomas loved his wife but was unwilling to give more than that.

“And what about me?” Mione needed to know how Thomas was going to deal with her. “What are you going to do to me now that I know who you really are?”

“Mione, do you remember our conversation just before I found out about Harry Sebastian?” Thomas rubbed his thumb over Mione’s knuckles.

“Yes.” Mione wished Thomas would stop touching her.

“I meant it. No matter what, I will always love you.” Thomas promised. “As to who I really am, you should know that this isn’t the first time we’ve had this conversation. I obliterated you just before our marriage when I found out who you were after making the adoption potion.”

“You can’t restore my memories from then, can you?” Mione was well aware that in this world, obliterated memories usually faded permanently after three or four years. Harry had been lucky to recover Nicole’s memory when he did.

Thomas shook his head. “I’m afraid not, but I can show you what happened.”

Mione needed to know what had gone on. “Please.”

Thomas headed off to his study, before returning with his pensieve. “I’ve put the pertinent memories in there.”

Mione entered the pensieve warily, making sure she kept her distance from Thomas as she watched herself interacting with a somewhat younger version of him. As the memories ended, she withdrew from the pensieve. “I didn’t handle it very well, did I?”

“Not really but I’m not surprised.” Thomas resumed his position on the sofa. “So tell me, how do you feel about things now?”

“It’s certainly not any easier now to discover the truth about you than it was then. If anything, it’s even harder.” Mione found she could be honest about her feelings.

“Why?” Thomas asked as he tried to ascertain his wife’s mindset.

“Because we’ve been married for seven years, and we have three children now.” Mione avoided mentioning the word ‘love’.

Thomas didn’t. “Do you still love me?” As he watched numerous emotions play across his wife’s face, he moved to sit down at her feet.

“Yes.” Mione again wasn’t lying. “But just because I know the truth and I love you more now than I did then, it still doesn’t mean I can live with it.”

Thomas had been afraid that his wife would react in that way. “Mione, are you trying to say that you want me to obliterate you again?”

“I don’t know.” Mione responded hesitantly, knowing that it would be suspicious if she said no straightaway. “The way I found out the truth about you was brutal to say the least, and I just know that I can’t face going through something like that again. But I also know that I’m not sure whether I can stay with you, knowing who you are either.”

“Would you consider at least thinking about it?” Thomas wasn’t simply willing to just obliterate his wife.

“What do you suggest?” Mione decided it would be better if she let Thomas lead the conversation.

“I think we should extend your week of absence from work to two weeks, and we’ll talk during that time.” Thomas offered. “If after those two weeks, you decide that you can’t live with the knowledge of who I am then, as much as I don’t want to do it, I’ll have to obliterate you.”

Mione said nothing for a short time as if she was considering his suggestion. "I have some stipulations first."

"What are they?" Thomas was willing to consider almost anything if it would ensure that his wife's memory remained intact.

"I want replacement wands, and I'd prefer for you to keep your own wands locked up in my presence." Mione wasn't willing to have Thomas to have the ability to attack her, even though she didn't really expect that he would.

"Agreed to a point." Thomas wasn't about to let his only defenses be locked away. "I'll leave my wands in my bedroom during the day, but you can't expect me to leave my family defenseless."

"Even though I know that no-one could access the Island without your permission, I'm willing to agree to that." Mione indicated her acceptance, before continuing. "I'm going to be sleeping alone for the foreseeable future."

Thomas wasn't exactly happy about the proviso but he accepted it. "Agreed. I'm willing to wait for you to come to me."

Mione couldn't hide her relief, and she made another demand. "I want to see my niece."

"I'll ask her if she wishes to see you once the two weeks are up." Thomas countered. "But I want your word that under no circumstances will you reveal to her that her mother and some of her friends still believe in her innocence."

"Why not?" Mione queried.

"Cammie is exceptionally gifted when it comes to the Dark Arts." Thomas had watched his niece master every single spell he knew himself, including the killing curse. "And I have no intention of letting sort of potential slip out of my grasp. If you can't agree to what I've asked, then I can't allow you to see her."

“That’s acceptable.” Mione wanted to see Cammie to apologize for her own disbelief of the girl’s innocence, even if she couldn’t tell Cammie about Hermione, Luna and Xander still having faith in her. “I also need you to promise not to hurt my friends.”

“I can’t do that.” Thomas refused the demand. “I’ve already made clear my position as to where they stand.”

Realizing that Thomas wasn’t going to back down on the point, Mione relented. “I suppose I’ll have to be content with that much.”

Thomas decided to make his stance even clearer. “Mione, I don’t want your friends to become a bone of contention between us, but my life as Dominus, and my life as your husband are two entirely different matters. And if you want to retain your memories, then you’re going to have to learn to deal with them in that way.”

Conscious of the fact that Thomas would oblivate her if she couldn’t, Mione reluctantly nodded. “I’ll do my best but in the same manner, you have to understand that I will always defend my friends against you.”

Thomas made the decision to cut Mione a little slack. “In that case, I will agree to listen to any reasonable argument you may construct on your friends’ behalf should it become necessary for you to make such a defense.”

“Thank you.” Mione didn’t push the issue any harder, believing quite rightly, that Thomas wouldn’t shift from the position he’d assumed. “Will I be allowed to leave the Island during the two weeks?”

“No.” Thomas responded negatively but went on to explain. “While I trust you, I want this time to be about us. And in the light of that, I’m going to ask Theresa to take the children to stay with my parents.”

Mione went along with Thomas’ plan. “I think it would be best for them to be out of the way.”

“Then that’s settled.” Thomas looked expectantly at his wife. “Unless there is anything else you need?”

“There isn’t.” Mione couldn’t think of anything. “And if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to take a shower and get changed.”

“I’ll firecall Theresa and arrange for the jet to pick her and the children up tomorrow.” Thomas climbed to his feet. “Dinner will be at seven.” Thomas paused before leaving the room. “Actually before you go, I have a few stipulations I’d like to make of my own.”

Mione wasn’t entirely surprised. “Go ahead.”

“While I understand you’re not ready to sleep with me again just yet, I do expect you to share every meal with me.” Thomas intended to spend as much time with Mione as he could. “And as much as I don’t want to be apart from you, I may have to spend some time every morning going over business matters that I can’t get through during the night.”

“During the night?” Mione queried his comment.

“You know that I rarely sleep for more than four or five hours at most.” Thomas reminded his wife of his sleeping habits. “And without you to occupy the rest of the night hours, I’ll take advantage of the time to deal with my business matters.”

“Will I be allowed to firecall Remus and ask for work to be sent to me?” Mione felt trapped at the thought of not being allowed to work to take her mind off things.

“I’d prefer it if you didn’t.” Thomas wanted his wife focused on the matter at hand, and not work. “But if you feel it necessary to do something, then I have some things you could be doing for me.”

“Genuine business matters?” Mione had no intention of aiding Thomas in anything nefarious.

“I apologize for using you in the way I did.” Thomas alluded to the research he’d had Mione undertake for him relating to the Pillars. “But out of everyone I know, you are the best researcher I’ve ever come across, and it would have been stupid to overlook that fact.”

Mione noticed that he hadn’t satisfied her question. “It still hasn’t answered my question, Thomas.”

“I give you my word that anything I ask you to do during the two weeks will be genuine business matters relating to the Corporation.” Thomas didn’t bother to tell his wife that he probably wouldn’t need any further help in completing the ritual until he’d gained access to the Death Chamber and had reviewed the Propylaeum in more detail.

“Then I accept your offer.” Mione rose to her feet. “I’ll see you at seven.”

Thomas inclined his head as Mione disappeared, before heading for the fireplace.

Once in her room, Mione spelled the shower on and after stripping off her dirty clothes stood under it, water and tears mingling together as she once again overcame the now diminished calming potion, and gave into her fears.

There was no evidence on Mione’s face that she’d been crying when she joined Thomas for an almost surreal dinner. At the end of the evening, when she excused herself from her husband, her heart skipped a beat as Thomas took her hand. “I thought you said you’d let me come to you.”

“I’m just going to escort you back to your bedroom.” Thomas led Mione along in silence until they were standing outside of her bedroom door. Before releasing her hand, he took it and brushed his lips over her knuckles. “Goodnight.”

As Thomas released her hand, Mione was reminded of how he’d treated her when she’d first stayed on the Island. “Goodnight.”

That first evening was to set the tone for the remainder of the two weeks. As he had done when he'd initially been attracted to her, Thomas left his wife small tokens in her bedroom every night, including a box of the chocolates from Paris he knew she loved. On the final night, Thomas was waiting with a single black rose in his hands when Mione stepped out of her bathroom.

Mione remembered back to when he'd left such a rose in her room when he'd first asked her to sleep with him. Only this time, she knew he was looking for a different answer to a different question. "You need my response, don't you?"

Thomas countered with a question of his own. "Have you reached some sort of decision, Mione?"

Mione deliberately vacillated before answering. "I don't know what to do, Thomas. I don't want to live a lie but I don't want to live with knowing who you are."

Feeling defeated, Thomas asked in a weary voice. "So you want me to oblivate you then?"

Mione forced tears to come to her eyes. "I don't what frightens me more; going back to not knowing who you really are and living a happy lie. Or living with the truth, and having to accept you for who you really are."

"What frightens you about living with the truth?" Thomas didn't want to oblivate her if there was any chance she might be able to cope.

"I'm afraid of having to live a lie for my friends; afraid of what I know you could do to me; afraid of myself for still wanting you despite knowing who you really are and what you've done. But most of all, now that I do know, I'm afraid of the rest of the world finding out and taking you from me." As she acknowledged the truth in her words to herself, suddenly Mione found that her tears weren't for pretence anymore and that she was openly crying.

For the first time since Mione had been returned to him by Sirius, Thomas gathered her into his arms. "Mione, I have no intention of letting the world do anything of the sort."

"I'm so frightened, Thomas." Mione wept against him. "But I don't want to lose my memories."

Thomas hoped that he wasn't misintepreting Mione's words. "You don't want me to oblivate you?"

Mione stepped back and wiped her eyes. "No. But I still need time, Thomas, before we can even think about going back to the way we were. Even though we've had these two weeks together like this, I need to get to know the real you before I can consider placing our relationship back on the footing it once occupied."

Thoroughly relieved and extremely happy, Thomas immediately accepted what Mione had told him. "Then we'll take it one day at a time." He smiled at his wife. "Would you like a glass of champagne before you retire?"

"I think I would." Mione wished she could have some calming potion as well, but decided she'd have to settle for the champagne alone.

May 4th 2010

Remus didn't betray how he was feeling when Thomas and Mione appeared in the doorway. "Have you decided to come and work for me as well, Thomas?"

Thomas laughed and, his hand outstretched, walked fully into the office. "I just thought I'd escort my wife to work as I have a meeting close by. After what happened to her, I didn't want to take any chances."

After reluctantly shaking Thomas' hand, Remus handed over a bracelet. "In order to ensure that such a thing can't happen again, Sirius has arranged for this. It will allow Mione to portkey directly to one of the cells in the Ministry."

“Cells?” Thomas questioned as he rolled the portkey over in his hands. “How safe are they?”

“The wards that protect them would tear anyone else who attempted to portkey with her apart.” Remus was aware that Thomas was more than familiar with that sort of magic. “And as only Harry and Sirius are able to access the cell, Mione would be safe.”

“And what happens if they’re both incapacitated?” Thomas queried. “I don’t want Mione stuck in there forever.”

“It’s a two way portkey. The secondary destination needs inputting.” Remus wanted to see where Mione would choose.

Mione didn’t make the choice herself, instead turning to Thomas. “Will you input the destination?”

“I think the Island is the safest place.” Thomas tapped the portkey with his wand. “Portus Secundus Islandia Seville.” He then passed it to Mione. “Put it on.”

Mione slid it onto her wrist. “I’ll see you at dinner then.”

“I thought I might take you to lunch.” Thomas offered.

“I doubt I’ll be getting any lunch with this lot to get through.” Mione indicated the stack of files.

Remus smiled. “Xander, while being a steady worker, isn’t anywhere near your equal.”

Mione gave Remus a bright smile in return. “That maybe so, but I’ll have to thank him to stepping into my shoes yet again, and for leaving me with a ton of catching-up to do.”

Remus dismissed her concerns. “While I’m glad that you’re ready to come back to work, especially as I’ve missed you, I think that you should take it easy today.”

Thomas decided that meant his wife would be free to have lunch with him. "In that case, I'll see you at twelve." Thomas turned to Remus. "Would you like to join us?"

"I'm afraid that I already have lunch plans." Remus didn't think he could sit through lunch with Thomas. "But thank you for the invitation."

"Then you should join us for dinner one night this week." Thomas suggested.

Remus refused. "I'm afraid that with Mione's absence, I'm more than a little behind with work, so I'm going to have to decline. Perhaps some other time?"

"I'll arrange something. I'll return at midday." Thomas then took Mione's hand and let his lips brush over her knuckles before leaving.

Remus waited a while before casting a privacy spell around the entire office. "Are you alright?"

Mione shook her head. "It's harder than I thought it would be."

"Which part?" Remus asked.

"All of it." Mione rubbed her temples. "I'd better get on."

Remus realized that she was reluctant to discuss Thomas, and not wanting to press matters, he let the privacy spell fail, and left to return to his own office.

Next chapter: Thomas steps up his assault on both the Muggle and wizarding worlds; Mione finds herself in the position of having to defend a friend.

Chapter 69: Courage Under Fire

September 25th 2010

Tonks smiled as Cassandra rocked her godson. "He's only just eaten, so I'd be careful."

Cassandra didn't mind. "The birthday boy's not going to be sick on his Auntie Cass, is he?"

Luna raised her eyebrows. "Why is it he can call you Cass, and no-one else can?"

"I do, and so does Harry." Orion reminded her. "And little Jim Jim is going to, aren't you?"

Katherine hated the nickname Orion used for her brother. "His name is James, Ori."

"It's too confusing." Orion retorted. "And he likes being called Jim Jim, don't you?"

The dark-haired little boy gurgled sleepily at his brother-in-law as he realized he was being talked about. Katherine just rolled her eyes as she glanced over at her father-in-law. "What are the newspapers saying?"

Sirius put down the Muggle newspaper, that like him, James had delivered on a daily basis. "The attacks on Muggle cities are becoming more widespread and heavier. He's getting bolder and bolder. And I have a horrible feeling that the smaller attacks he's making on the wizarding world will begin to escalate soon."

Harry Sebastian ran his hand through his hair, revealing his agitation. "I agree, and after what happened to Mione, Thomas is getting more careful. But I did overhear a conversation that Thomas is going to be making Death Eaters remove their masks, so he knows who is being told about the raids. Soon I don't think that I'm going to be able to attend the meetings because of that, and Harry isn't going to be able

to warn us about anything at all without it becoming apparent who's passed on the information. I therefore think that maybe it's time he left."

"He won't do it." Sirius had already suggested the idea to his godson. "He's aware that he'll be facing Aurors when Thomas finally turns his full attention on the wizarding world, and Harry said if he saves just one life by remaining with Thomas, then it's worth staying even if he ends up injured himself." As he said it, Sirius had no idea that within a few days he was going to be grateful that Harry had refused to leave.

"I thought he might say that." H.J. had grown to respect the young man and what he was doing. "But with all this fighting, I'm worried about Cammie."

"I saw her in the last skirmish I was in at Manchester." Cassandra revealed, as she continued to hold baby James, who after his meal and all the excitement of his birthday party was starting to drift off to sleep. "Even though she was wearing a silver mask, I knew it had to be her; she was the only woman, and the only one using non-lethal spells. But even given her failure to use deadly force, we still have no idea whether she's loyal to Thomas or not."

Mione had tried again and again to get Cammie to come and see her, but the girl was still refusing. "From what Thomas has said, I think that she wasn't at first, but if she's out there and fighting, I'd say that that has changed. Then again Thomas believes that Harry Potter is loyal to him, and we all know how untrue that is."

"I just wish we knew for sure. I want my daughter home." H.J. had told Harry Potter to try and sound out his daughter, but the dark-haired wizard had refused. "Harry should at least try and make some effort to find out where her loyalties truly lie."

"He can't do that, H.J. as he can't take the chance his cover will be blown." Harry knew that the Potter heir had been influenced by Cho Diggory, and her opinion about Cammie's relationship with Cedric.

“Well, you know what I believe.” Luna was still sticking to her original belief in Cammie. “And I’m not changing my mind about Cammie.”

Hermione agreed with Luna. “And I feel the same way.” Hermione glanced over at where her four year old son was playing quietly with little Sophia Lupin and Callie Black. “Even though I didn’t give birth to Cammie, she’s my baby just as much as Sevvie is.”

“I’m sure Cammie knows that.” Cassandra had changed her opinion about Cammie after Harry Potter had revealed why Cammie had joined Thomas. Sighing, she looked wistfully at the little boy in her arms before turning her attention to the softly curved stomach that Luna was stroking. “You’re getting bigger.”

Luna hadn’t been able to miss the almost hungry look on Cassandra’s face. “Do you want to feel it? He’s starting to wriggle around now.”

Cassandra reached out and felt a tiny kick, before pulling her hand back. “You’re so lucky.”

Harry heard the hitch in his wife’s voice. “Are you okay, Cass?”

Luna realized she must have missed something as she witnessed the loving but sad look the couple shared. “Have I said something wrong?”

“I found out a short time ago that I can’t have children because of the injuries I sustained at the hands of Starr.” Cassandra gave a slightly watery smile. “While we didn’t think there was a problem at the time, it turns out we were wrong.”

A massive wave of guilt hit Mione. “I feel terrible.”

Harry refused to let Mione blame herself for what Thomas had brought about. “It isn’t your fault, Mione.”

Mione still felt responsible. "If there's anything I can do to help you or Harry, please tell me."

"There isn't anything anyone can do." Cassandra responded, her voice despondent as she went back to rocking little James. "In the last three weeks I've seen more than ten healers from all over the world, and they all say the same thing."

Tonks identified with Cassandra's pain as she'd had trouble herself getting pregnant with little James. "Cassandra, I know I might be stepping out of line but have you inquired about Muggle fertility treatment?"

James explained his wife's comment. "Nymy and I looked into it when we thought she couldn't conceive naturally."

Cassandra hadn't. "Muggle fertility treatment?"

Tonks and James explained between them about what it entailed as everyone listened. As they'd gone on, Cassandra's face had taken on a hopeful look. "And you say it's expensive?"

Tonks converted the amount to galleons for Cassandra. "About 5,000 galleons per treatment. And it's not guaranteed to work even then."

Cassandra whistled. "That is quite an amount but I've got far more than that in my smallest trust fund."

"And we're hardly poor." Harry had built quite a nest egg after investing his money wisely. "I made quite a profit when I sold my apartment."

"But we're supposed to be saving it to buy a house." Cassandra announced their intentions to the group. "I've fallen in love with Vettriano Square but it's pretty expensive."

"Even if you sell your place?" Katherine was aware that the price of Cassandra's penthouse had risen in contrast to the general state of the property market.

Cassandra had spent hours with Harry going over their finances when they'd tried to decide if they could afford a house in the exclusive wizarding area. "Yes. It's almost four times as expensive. Dad's offered to pay the difference but he's done enough already."

"I'll help." Mione offered. "And before you say anything, the money would be mine. I have my share of the money from the basilisk sales as well as what I earn working for Remus."

Harry refused her offer. "We can afford the house but we don't want to overstretch ourselves. But after learning that money might be the answer to our problem, if it came down to choosing between a house and a baby, I'd choose the baby."

Aware that something could be done for his daughter, Sirius wasn't about to let money stand in her way. "Buy the house. We'll give you the money for the treatment."

Faith slipped her hand into Sirius' and backed up her husband. "Sirius is right. Your happiness is far more important than money."

Cassandra passed James over to his mother, and hugged both Faith and her father. "Dad, Faith, you have no idea how much this means to us."

"I think we do." Sirius and Faith both looked over to where Siri was reading with Emily Lupin. "Just let us know what you need, and we'll do the rest."

Remus looked pointedly at Luna and Xander as a lull fell over the conversation. Xander got up and put an arm around his wife. "While we're on the subject of babies, Luna and I have something to tell you all."

Harry hadn't missed the look that Remus had sent the couple's way. "Is the baby alright?"

“He’s healthy.” Xander assured Harry that his unborn son was physically well before relaying other news about him. “But he’s also a squib.”

“I’m so sorry.” It was now Cassandra’s turn to feel uncomfortable.

“It’s okay.” Luna reached out and took her friend’s hand. “We both knew that it was a possibility when we were trying for a baby. So given that our son won’t be magical, we’ve decided to take up Remus’ original offer of a position in San Francisco where we can raise him away from the magical world. We’re actually going to be leaving in a few days.”

Everyone in the room was reeling but all of them understood. Cassandra got up and hugged Luna. “I’ll miss you.”

Luna put on a brave face. “I imagine you’ll visit me, so it won’t be too bad.”

Katherine took Cassandra’s place as she released Luna. “Are you sure you won’t reconsider?”

Luna shook her head. “We’ve thought this through carefully, and our son will have to attend a Muggle nursery and the like, and given that, it’s better that he knows nothing about the magical world until he’s old enough to understand why he can’t be part of it.”

One by one the group hugged both Luna and Xander. Then not wanting to become too maudlin, the conversation turned to other things until it began to get late, and the gathering disbanded.

His daughters asleep in his arms, Remus nodded to Sirius instead of shaking his hand, and finished off what he’d been discussing with his friend just before Faith had said it was time to get the children home. “We know it’s only a matter of time before Thomas starts in more heavily on the wizarding world.”

Sirius had expected it far earlier, and believed that it was only because of Mione’s influence that Thomas had so far restrained

himself to minor attacks on the wizarding world up until then. "We just have to be ready."

Mione hadn't been able to find out anything from her husband without his becoming suspicious, leaving Harry and the others in the dark. "I just wish I knew when it was coming."

"Don't we all?" Remus kissed Mione's cheek. "Be careful out there."

"We will." Leaving Remus at the entrance to the Academy, Mione strode off, following Sirius, not realizing that even as she walked away, the attacks they feared were being planned by her husband.

Castrum House

As the others were discussing him and Cammie, Harry Potter was seated in an Inner Circle meeting. "So you want me to lead the attack on Traverse Alley?"

Thomas confirmed he did. "You'll take twenty men, Cho Diggory, and Greyback."

Cho had become Harry's apprentice after Lily had died. "While I understand taking Cho, Greyback is a liability."

"I have every confidence you'll be able to deal with him." Thomas made it clear that Harry had little choice in the matter as he moved onto the next subject. "Once we've dealt with the larger public areas, I intend to take Hogwarts." Thomas pinned Harry with a piercing stare. "So tell me, Harry, exactly where do your loyalties lie when it comes down to choosing between your family and serving me?"

"My loyalties lie with you." Harry answered unswervingly. "But I won't deny that I love my family, and I'm aware that they'll come under attack when you do take Hogwarts."

Thomas was satisfied with Harry's answer, in that he hadn't denied his feelings. "I expected you to say as much, so when we take Hogwarts, you will remain here."

Harry was frustrated but offered no resistance. "Of course, Thomas."

Lucius wanted to know when Thomas intended to make his move. "When is the attack planned for?"

Thomas had no intention of revealing the date in front of Harry, as while Thomas trusted him in all other matters, he was taking no chances as far as Hogwarts was concerned. "I haven't decided yet, but I'll let you know when I do." He then dismissed everyone except for his niece. "Cammie, please stay behind."

Cammie remained seated as everyone else left. "Yes?"

"Mione still wants to see you." Thomas had been making the same request of Cammie on a weekly basis ever since Mione had agreed to stay with him.

"I don't want to see her." Cammie had no wish to have anything to do with her aunt, and she made a request of Thomas. "Can I speak freely?" When Thomas indicated she could, she went on to make her position clear. "While I'm here because you continue to force me to stay, she's with you of her own free will, and I find that disgusting."

Thomas' niece had proven stronger willed in resisting him and her addiction to the Dark Arts than Thomas would have ever given her credit for, and she continued to make her feelings very clear about the distasteful situation she was in. "Mione agreed to stay with me because she loves me unconditionally, but, as I've tried to tell you time and time again, that doesn't mean that she's happy about what I'm doing."

"It doesn't matter how much she loves you and that she says she doesn't like what you're doing; it still doesn't change the fact of what you are, and that she's still with you." Cammie rose to her feet.

"Sit down." Thomas hadn't finished with his niece yet.

Cammie sat down, her face set. "I'm not going to change my mind."

"I want you to consider something." Thomas tried attacking the problem from a different angle. "If you were in Mione's shoes and discovered what she had about someone you loved, what would you have done?"

"I'd have left them even if I loved them unconditionally." Cammie was fervent in her response.

"Then you couldn't say that you loved them unconditionally." Thomas was aware that even though his niece intended to spend the rest of her life with her current partner, since she'd moved on from Harry, just like him, she had clamped down on her feelings, not wanting to get hurt again. "If you did, you'd be willing to put up with as much as Mione is doing."

"Being in love doesn't mean that someone has to ignore their conscience." Cammie wasn't going to change her mind about her aunt. "And just because Mione might be able to overlook what kind of a man you are, it doesn't mean I could."

Thomas scowled. "Yet you're ignoring your conscience every day that I send you out to fight for me."

Cammie didn't like being reminded of what she was doing. "We both know that because of the threat you hold over my head, that I have little choice in the matter. However, I don't take lives, and I never will, so at least my conscience is clear on that score. Can your wife say the same about her choice?"

Recognizing he was getting nowhere, Thomas dismissed his niece. "Just think about changing your mind."

"You mean you're not actually going to hold the usual threat over my head because I'm refusing?" Using the opportunity to speak freely, Cammie questioned Thomas as she picked up her mask, having expected Thomas to have used his usual solution against her ever since he had first made the request of her.

"Your aunt won't allow me to do that." Thomas would have done so if Mione hadn't been so resolute about it.

"So she still has some scruples left." Cammie's voice was full of sarcasm.

Thomas' response was laden with the same sentiment. "Says the woman who is sleeping with a married man."

Cammie reddened under her uncle's attack but she defended herself anyway. "It's not as if his wife cares. And if you hadn't strove to split Harry and myself up, then I wouldn't have been in a position where I found it necessary to resort to such a move."

"I didn't force you to sleep with him." Thomas wasn't going to take the blame for Cammie's affair. "You could have said no."

"And so could Mione when you asked her to stay with you." Cammie got back onto the subject of her aunt. "But she didn't, so quite frankly, when it comes down to it, I believe that what your wife is doing, betraying her friends and family so that she can share the bed of an immoral killer, means that she's the one displaying the lack of ethics, and not me."

"Watch yourself, Cammie." Thomas warned.

"You said I could speak freely." Cammie reminded Thomas of his allowance. "And I'm sure you'd prefer the truth from me."

"In that case, let's speak freely, Cammie." Thomas advanced on his niece. "You're sleeping with an immoral killer yourself, and while you refuse to take a life while you're out fighting for me now, you seem to be forgetting about your first kill. You've killed for me not once, but twice, Cammie; something my wife has never done. Now tell me that my wife is on shakier moral ground than you are."

Even with Thomas looming over her, Cammie didn't give up on her argument. "Mione wasn't forced to kill anyone as I was. And unlike me, she doesn't have to stay with you. She has somewhere else she can go to; friends she can turn to. Whereas I've got no-one and nowhere else to go."

"You've got Cedric and Regulus." Thomas pointed out the flaw in his niece's argument.

"And they're both Death Eaters." Cammie hit back. "I live in a world you've crafted because I have to, and if I could leave it, I would. Mione, however, could turn her back on it, but we both know she's not going to as she's sold her soul to stay with you." Cammie had no idea that she was repeating Mione's own words about her relationship with Thomas.

Thomas was fed up with Cammie's criticism of his wife. "While I allow you more leeway than others, it doesn't extend to your insulting my wife. In future your ability to speak freely will not include being so rude about Mione, Cammie.

Cammie wasn't about to apologize for her words. "Noted, but just because you threaten me, it doesn't mean I'm going to change my mind or my opinion about Mione."

Not wanting to do something he'd regret, Thomas finally ended the conversation. "I think you should go."

Glad to escape, Cammie left.

Two days later

Feeling his ring vibrating, Harry stopped lecturing to the students in front of him. "Class dismissed." He then vanished, leaving them wondering what was happening. They didn't have to wait long to find out as alarms throughout the Ministry began sounding.

Traverse Alley, Manchester

Twenty Death Eaters in white masks, two in silver, and one in red, apparated into the main shopping area. The shorter of the two silver masked ones barked out commands. "Logus, deal with the wards. The rest of you will round everyone up. If they resist, kill them." Before the largest Death Eater could move away, Harry Potter

grabbed him. "Keep your hands off the children. If you don't, I'll kill you myself."

Fenrir Greyback acknowledged Harry's warning. "I know what my orders are."

"Just make sure you stick to them." Harry had witnessed the werewolf rip apart a young Muggle boy on one of their missions when they'd attacked Muggle London, and he'd almost been sick to his stomach. Thomas had punished the werewolf as even he drew the line at attacking young children.

"Your wish is my command." Fenrir's voice was mocking as he walked away.

Harry decided he'd have to do something to bring Greyback in line when they got back to Castrum House; otherwise the werewolf would walk all over him. His attention was returned to his surroundings as Aurors began to appear, and Harry had little choice but to return fire on them, trying to ensure that his shots merely wounded rather than killing.

At the same time as Harry, Cho and Rupert were carrying out Thomas' orders in Traverse Alley, similar operations were going on elsewhere in the British Isles. Lucius, Blaise and Ginny were dealing with Corner Street in Birmingham, and Thomas himself was tackling Diagon Alley in London. Cammie, however, found herself in Scotland.

Athwart Row, Edinburgh

As she always did when she was sent out in the field, Cammie was shaking when she apparated into the Row, Regulus and Cedric flanking her. Regulus began to bark out orders just as Harry had. Once everyone else had left, he turned to Cammie. "I know you don't want to be here, but just stay close to me."

"I'm not killing anyone." Cammie reminded the man who still acted as her mentor.

“Just defend yourself if you have to.” Regulus was only too well aware of Cammie’s reluctance to kill. “I’ll do whatever is necessary.”

Cammie swallowed as pops sounded around them. “Aurors.”

“Stay calm and don’t panic.” Regulus instructed her. “If things get hairy, get out.”

“Reducto.” As she found herself under attack, Cammie yelled out the curse almost without thinking. And as Harry was doing in Manchester, she tried to wound only, not kill.

Sirius suspected it was Cammie who’d opened fire on the Aurors who’d apparated in just moments before he had, and he recognized the mask of the man next to her as belonging to the person they suspected was Amicus; the man who’d wriggled out of an arrest once before making Sirius all the more determined to take the man down. As a blasting spell sailed by him, and unsure of Cammie’s loyalties, Sirius had little choice except to return to fire in kind. “Reducto.”

Cammie easily shielded against the spell, as Regulus dealt with the two Aurors who had accompanied Sirius. When she realized who had just sent the spell at her, she downgraded her attack. “Expelliarmus.”

Sirius knew for sure then that it was Cammie, and after sending a similarly low powered spell back at her, he sent a more lethal threefold spell at Regulus, who’d just managed to take out one of the Aurors with a blasting curse. “Reducto. Reducto. Reducto.”

Regulus couldn’t stand up to Sirius’ successive spells, especially as the remaining Auror had fired the same spell at him. Unable to defend against the multiple bombardment, the last two Reductos both penetrated his shield, boring a hole through his shoulder, and another one through his thigh as he flew backwards through the air.

Cammie gasped in horror, and threw her emergency portkey towards Regulus. “Castrum Sanctum.”

Sirius swore as the Death Eater they most wanted to apprehend vanished, and he turned his focus on taking down Cammie without injuring her. "Stupefy. Stupefy. Stupefy."

Cammie managed to defend against the first two spells but the Auror next to Sirius wasn't being as heedful as his superior, and Sirius' final Stupefy missed entirely as the Auror's Reducto spell hit Cammie in the shoulder, knocking her off her feet and out of the way of it. Sirius rushed over, but before he could apprehend her, she too vanished.

The Auror gaped at his superior, wondering why Sirius hadn't used a Reducto on the Death Eater. His attention, however, was drawn back to the skirmish as several more Death Eaters poured onto the street in front of him. Activating his fallen partner's medical ring, he started to fight them as a sizzling sensation alerted him to the fact that no-one would be leaving until the wards were brought down.

Diagon Alley

Cassandra ducked as yet another killing curse whistled past her head, and together with her husband, she dove headlong behind a pile of barrels. "What the hell is taking the wardbreakers so long?"

"I'll find out." Harry crouched ready to run. "Cover me."

Cassandra shot her head above the barrels and began using the threefold spell to provide as much cover as possible. She'd had to resort to using it as, even though it would quickly tire her out using it so often, she couldn't use Harry's trick of fog or darkness with Aurors fighting wand to wand. After Harry had made it safely across the street and disappeared out of sight, Cassandra continued to bob up and down from behind the barrels, trying to pick off Death Eaters as they took on the team Harry had been leading. She'd just dropped back down behind the largest barrel when a familiar gold-masked figure walked out into the street right beside where Cassandra was hidden from sight by the barrels.

Thomas strolled towards the fighting, not realizing that Cassandra was more or less on top of him, and he therefore hadn't yet set up a shield, wrongly believing he was safe. Cassandra took the chance to

fire on him as he walked by and she popped up above the barrel. "Reducto."

Hearing the faint sound of Cassandra's boot as it scraped the cobblestone as she rose, Thomas began to erect a shield at the same time as he dropped to try and avoid the spell. He wasn't quite quick enough as the spell blew a small hole in his arm instead of his head.

Cassandra cursed for not being able to bring herself to use the killing curse to take Thomas out. Her reluctance led to her coming under attack as Thomas rewarded her with his full attention, and the curse she hadn't been able to utilize. "Avada Kedavra."

Cassandra rolled out of the way as the spell hit the floor right where she'd been crouching. Still not able to bring herself to inflict the curse, Cassandra sent a different spell at Thomas. "Confringo."

His wards still in place despite Harry's best efforts to bring them down, Thomas was able to apparate out of the way of the spell, and reappeared directly behind Cassandra. Only a teeny crack and one word signified that he was behind her. "Boo."

Hearing the mocking word, Cassandra swung around, but she wasn't quick enough as Thomas' fist smashed into her face and she staggered backwards, hitting her head sharply as she lost her footing and impacted the same barrel she'd been hiding behind.

After helping the wardbreaker to eventually bring down Thomas' wards, Harry returned to the spot where he'd left his wife, only to find she'd gone, a splatter of blood the only evidence she'd been there in the first place.

Grimmauld Square

Mione hurried into the hallway when she heard Thomas apparate in. She couldn't miss the bloody arm he was sporting. "What happened to you?"

Thomas removed his mask. "I ran into Cassandra."

"Is she alright?" Mione was terribly afraid for her friend.

"For the moment." Thomas put down his mask on the side table, and leant against the wall. "But I intend to make an example of her."

"How?" Mione asked nervously, more than worried by the implacable look on her husband's face.

"I'm going to feed her to Potter on the night of the full moon." Thomas decided.

"Please don't." Mione pleaded. "She's my friend."

"And I said, I only agreed to leave your friends alone if they didn't attack me first." Thomas lifted his arm to show Mione the small hole in it. "And as you can see, she attacked me. If I hadn't ducked in time, I'd be dead now."

"She doesn't know who you are, and she's just doing her job." Mione defended Cassandra's actions, even as her heart lurched at what Thomas had told her about his near miss. "You've already put her through hell once, please don't do it again."

"I'm sure Potter will make it quick." Thomas was unmoved by Mione's defense.

Mione fell back on the one thing she knew she had in her favor, and dropped to her knees, taking Thomas' hand. "Please, Thomas, if you love me, you won't do this."

Thomas pulled his wife up. "Mione, you of all people will never have to kneel before me."

"I'm willing to do whatever I have to if it means I can save my friend." Mione made it clear that she wasn't giving up without a fight.

Thomas also refused to back down. "I can't just let this slide, Mione. It would make me look weak."

Mione noticed that Thomas was no longer threatening to kill Cassandra, and she made a suggestion. "There must be another way to deal with Cassandra without having to lose face."

Normally Thomas would have tortured her, but he was aware that Mione would be just as upset if he suggested that alternative. "I tell you what. I'll let her live, and I won't lift a finger against her."

Knowing Thomas as she did, Mione knew there had to be more to it. "But you're still going to punish her, aren't you?"

"Yes." Thomas had thought of a third alternative. "I'm going to give her to Fenrir as a bed partner. He's had his sights on her for a while."

Mione recoiled in disgust. "He's an animal, Thomas. Cassandra would rather die than have him touch her."

"Then I'll let make Cassandra make that choice." Thomas decided to remove the onus of the decision onto Cassandra's shoulders.

"Please Thomas, reconsider." Mione begged. "I couldn't live with myself knowing that she's going to have to choose between her life and that monster."

"No." Thomas refused once more, as he cupped his wife's face. "You knew that it was eventually going to come down to something like this when you made your decision not to be obliterated."

"I know that." Mione couldn't stop the tears that filled her eyes as she was forced to look at her husband. "But I also didn't know it would be so hard to deal with."

"We both knew it would be hard for you, Mione. And while I do love you and would do anything for you, as I told you when we discussed this after you discovered who I am, my actions as Dominus are wholly separate from my life with you. So even though you don't like it, you're just going to have to learn to live with the decisions I make as Dominus." Thomas released Mione's face as, his face set in a hard

stance, he picked his mask back up. "I'll be back later after I've dealt with both my arm and Cassandra."

Mione dissolved into fully-fledged sobs as Thomas apparated out. Then realizing she was doing nothing to help Cassandra by crying about matters, she wiped her tears away, pulled on a jacket and headed out of the house across the street to Potter Place.

Castrum House

When Cassandra came to, she found that she was in what looked remarkably like a dungeon. "Oh crap."

Thomas laughed at her language. "I'd say that pretty much sums up your problem, my dear."

"So what kind of torture are you planning this time?" Cassandra was scared but acted as if she wasn't.

"I'm going to make an example of you." Thomas flicked his wand and Cassandra's chains vanished. "Walk. If you don't, then I'll make Starr's treatment of you look like a picnic."

Her legs shaking, Cassandra debated what to do, and not able to face the thought of going through the same torture she'd had to endure before, she started walking. She paled when she realized where she was. "Castrum House."

"In there." Thomas indicated the door to the ballroom.

As Cassandra walked in, she couldn't miss the fact that Thomas must have summoned every single Death Eater he had under his command. She had no idea that her husband was among the throng, having being alerted to the meeting by Harry Potter, and having been forewarned by Mione what Thomas intended to do.

Cassandra was forced onto the stage, and Thomas made an announcement. "Auror Sebastian here took a shot at me today, and I decided that she should pay for it with her life."

In the crowd, after what Mione had told him, Harry hadn't expected to hear that, and he readied himself to make a move to try and save his wife if he could.

Thomas continued. "However, I am not without compassion, because as like you yourselves, I realize that she was just doing her job."

Harry could feel his wife's apprehension at Thomas' words, and he wondered whether Thomas was planning to torture Cassandra instead; something that he also knew he couldn't stand by and watch.

Thomas, however, had decided to stick with what he'd told Mione he'd do. "Auror Sebastian, I'm going to give you a choice. I can you kill you now, or offer you as a gift."

Harry thought he was going to be sick, aware from Mione what a 'gift' meant. Cassandra too had an idea of what Thomas was alluding to. "A gift for who?"

"As overall, he's served me well, I've decided to offer you to Fenrir Greyback." Thomas watched the unmasked Death Eater grin from ear to ear as he assessed Cassandra.

Cassandra was horrified by Thomas' suggestion, and chose the alternative. "I'd rather die."

"So be it." Thomas went to pull out his wand.

Before Harry could spring forward, Cammie intervened. "No."

Gasps echoed around the room that someone had had the audacity to stop Thomas. The man in question span around to face his niece, his voice silky. "I beg your pardon, Carus."

Cammie, like Mione and Harry, couldn't simply stand by and let Thomas kill Cassandra. "I've just as much right to her as Greyback does. Like him and many of those before you, I've served you faithfully, and I therefore want her."

Thomas knew that Cammie's words were true but he also knew why she was defending Cassandra. "You're right. There are plenty of people here who have served me as well as Greyback, and you've therefore given me an idea." Thomas walked over to where Cassandra was being held between two of his men, and twirled a stray piece of her hair that had escaped from her ponytail between his fingers. "You're an attractive woman, Cassandra, or you would be without the black eye."

"Let go of me." Cassandra tried to pull free of Thomas' hold.

Thomas prevented her from moving by grasping her ponytail. "Whoever gets you is going to have a feisty one on his hands."

"I swear I'll kill them." Cassandra tugged again but once more Thomas' firm grip prevented her from moving.

"You're unarmed, my dear, and I doubt you'll be capable of defending against some of my more muscular cohorts." Thomas let go of Cassandra's hair.

"I'd rather die fighting than let your gang of apes rape me for your sport." Cassandra's chin shot up as she stared defiantly at Thomas.

"You've made that patently clear as well as your objection to becoming Greyback's bed partner." Thomas then filled Cassandra in on what he had planned. "So, in line with Carus' observation that she and everyone else here has a right to own you, I've decided to auction you off to the highest bidder."

"You'd better kill me, because there's no way you're doing that." Cassandra wasn't going to stand by and be sold off like a piece of meat.

"You've very little choice in the matter, my dear." Thomas turned to the crowd. "We'll start the bidding at ten thousand galleons. For daring to interfere, Carus, you're excluded."

Cassandra could do nothing but listen impotently as the bidding rose gradually in increments. Fenrir Greyback had made an offer of thirty

thousand galleons for her when Harry Potter's voice cut into the proceedings. "One hundred thousand galleons."

Thomas questioned Harry's reason for bidding. "Why do you want her?"

Harry marched over to where Cassandra was being held. "Sebastian took my lover from me today; I think it's only fair I take his wife from him." Cho had been killed by Harry Sebastian after he'd left Diagon Alley and joined Alasdair in Manchester where the fighting had still been going on. Holding a child hostage, Cho had left Harry, who believed her words that she'd kill the child if he didn't back off, little choice except to use lethal force against her when she'd started to utter the words of the killing curse. Harry had had no idea that Thomas had vetoed hurting any of the children and Cho had only been bluffing about killing the young girl.

Thomas watched Cassandra recoil, a look of disgust on her face, and he decided to accept the bid. "Very well. She's yours."

On the dais, as she was released by the two Death Eaters at Harry Potter's command, Cassandra took a step backwards away from him. "You're not touching me."

Harry stepped forward and grabbed her arm. "On the contrary, I'm going to be doing a lot more than touching you." He then tapped his mask with his wand, reducing it to a three-quarter version, before lacing his fingers together behind Cassandra's waist and roughly pulling her back towards him.

When Harry Potter forcefully kissed her, Cassandra bit down as hard she could on Harry's lower lip, drawing blood, and was swiftly released. "I warned you not to touch me."

After wiping the blood from his mouth, Harry backhanded her, sending her flying. "Bitch. Do it again, and I'll kill you." Harry turned to the white-masked Death Eaters. "Take her to my rooms. And don't even think about sampling her. If you do, I'll slice your fingers off one by one, and then I'll move on to your more tender parts."

In the crowd, Harry Sebastian didn't know whether he wanted to kill Harry Potter for daring to kiss his wife, or whether to thank him for saving her. The werewolf in him was screaming for the first option. Tamping down on his anger, Harry watched as Cassandra was dragged off.

Thomas was amused by Harry's treatment of both Cassandra and the Death Eaters, and he lowered his voice so that the general populous wasn't able to hear him. "You're going to have your hands full with her. Are you quite sure you want her? I can still offer her to Greyback."

Harry had no intention of letting Greyback get his hands on Cassandra. "That won't be necessary. Cassandra will learn to do as she's told whether she wants to or not."

"And I suppose you'd like to go now to start on her training." Thomas assumed that Harry would want to leave the meeting immediately.

Harry shrugged indifferently. "She can wait. I'd like to give her a little time to dwell on what's going to happen to her. After all, it's going to be a long and memorable night for both of us."

Thomas smirked behind his mask. "Speaking of memorable nights, I've thought of a wonderful present for Sebastian, a copy of this memory; something to keep him warm at night in his wife's absence. Do you have a message for him?"

"Sebastian, I'm going to break your wife, and I'm going to enjoy every second of it." Harry's voice was filled with malice. "You might want to think twice before you kill someone's lover next time."

Harry Sebastian knew that Thomas had no idea he'd already received the message, his hearing allowing him to hone in on the conversation. A short while later, the general meeting ended and he headed out to report in to Sirius what had happened to Cassandra.

After being dragged out, Cassandra found herself being shoved into a well-appointed sitting room. Aware that she wouldn't be able to get out via the main door and, after trying the windows and finding they

were both unbreakable as well as locked, Cassandra checked out the entirety of the apartment. After finding nothing of use, she resignedly picked up a book and sat down. An hour later, Harry Potter stalked into the room. "Get into the bedroom."

Cassandra threw the book at him. "Go to hell."

"You're going to be so sorry you did that, bitch." Harry snarled as he batted the book out the way. He then marched over and grabbed Cassandra's arm, pulling her forcibly into the bedroom, and closing the door behind them. Once inside, he erected a privacy spell to encompass the room, and released Cassandra. "Are you alright?"

"You could have been a little gentler." Cassandra's lip was swollen from where Harry had hit her.

"Sorry, but I needed to make it look real." Harry ran a thumb over her cheek. "Your face is a mess."

"The eye was compliments of that bastard." Cassandra's eyes fell upon Harry's mouth. "Sorry about your lip."

"It will heal in no time." Harry shrugged it off. "Thomas is sending a copy of his memory of what happened to Harry."

"At least he'll know I'm okay." Cassandra walked with Harry over to the fireplace.

"Hopefully he already does." Harry informed her as he warmed his hands. "Mione told us what Thomas was planning to do."

"Thomas told her?" Cassandra hadn't expected him to share what he'd planned with his wife.

"She's the only reason you're alive at all." Harry informed her. "Thomas intended to execute you outright but Mione begged for your life. She came over to Potter Place the minute Thomas left to come here."

“So how did Harry take it?” Cassandra had missed the ‘hopefully’ in Harry’s comment, and believed that he’d spoken to her husband.

“I don’t know. The last time I saw him before I returned here via Potter Place, your husband had just killed Cho.” Harry’s voice didn’t display any remorse for his lover’s death.

Cassandra expressed her regret, even though the girl had been a Death Eater. “I’m sorry, Harry.”

“She was a Death Eater, Cassandra and even though I was sleeping with her, I’m not upset about her death.” Harry’s voice rang with truth.

“But you’d been with her for two years.” Cassandra couldn’t believe that Harry felt nothing.

“She was just a means to an end.” Harry’s voice was hard. “I gleaned bits of information from her that I wouldn’t have gotten anywhere else. She made her choice, and now she’s paid for it.”

Cassandra placed a hand on Harry’s arm. “Harry, it’s okay to say that you’re upset.”

“I’m not.” Harry reinforced his comment. “Cho was nothing more than someone who I fucked occasionally, Cassandra.”

Cassandra winced at Harry’s crude description of his relationship with the woman. “What happened with Cammie really messed you up, didn’t it?”

Harry shook Cassandra’s arm off. “Cassandra, while I’m willing to tell you everything else that I can about what’s going on here, unless it’s pertinent to a matter at hand, I don’t want to discuss Cammie, not ever.”

Even though she was a little hurt by Harry’s attitude, Cassandra, however, wasn’t quite finished with the subject of her niece. “Then I have something to ask about her that is pertinent.”

Harry could see he'd hurt Cassandra's feelings and that she'd only been trying to offer comfort to him. "Cassandra, please don't take my reluctance to talk about Cammie personally. I have enough going on at the moment with my duties to Uncle Sirius as well as Thomas, and now I have you to take care of as well, without having to dissect how I feel about Cammie. However, if you have something to ask that's important about Cammie, then go ahead."

Cassandra's hurt was assuaged by Harry's words, and she asked the question she'd intended to. "Will Thomas punish Cammie for her interference tonight?"

Harry didn't believe he would. "I doubt it. Apart from Amicus, she's probably the only one who's able to get away with something like that."

Still mistakenly believing Rupert Giles to be Amicus, Cassandra wondered how a man like the former watcher had managed to get Thomas to trust him so implicitly. Realizing that the thought could wait, she refocused her attention on what Cammie had allowed Harry to achieve. "I'm surprised Thomas trusted you enough to let you buy me."

"I'm still not entirely sure he does." Harry glanced around the bedroom. "This is the only place I'm guaranteed my privacy, hence my reaction to you out in the sitting room, and the spell I cast even though I believe it's safe inside in here."

"I guessed as much." Cassandra sat down. "So what do we do now?"

"I don't know why, but I suspect Thomas will be paying me a visit so you had better get undressed." Even though the situation was still somewhat worrying, and he was beyond stressed, Harry grinned at Cassandra and wiggled his eyebrows. "And then I'll chain you to the bed."

Reacting in kind, and trying to keep up the lighter mood that Harry was visibly trying to bring about, Cassandra rolled her eyes. "You've

got more chance of flying to the moon on your broomstick than you have of chaining me to the bed, Potter."

"You said you'd be fighting against something like this, and I wouldn't want to have to take the chance you'd get your hands on a wand." Harry outlined his reasons for the comment. "So in light of our situation, I'm going to make some necessary alterations to your clothing, as I need to make it look as though I've had to wrestle to get them off you. I'll wait to see if Thomas turns up before resorting to restraining you."

Cassandra relented. "Fine. Do what you have to."

Harry strode over to her, and grabbed her blouse by the lapels. "Sorry."

As Harry tore the blouse open, Cassandra scowled. "There goes my favorite blouse."

"I'll buy you a new one when all this is over, but right now we need to make this look realistic." Harry pulled Cassandra's tie out of her hair, sending it tumbling down her back. "And you'd be resisting me all the way."

"Quite true." Cassandra sat down on the bed and tugged off her boots, holding up her hand as Harry's hand moved towards her waist. "You're not ripping my trousers off my body; it would hurt too much. I'll take them down, and you can rip them then." Harry averted his gaze as Cassandra removed her trousers and slipped into the bed. "I'm decent."

Harry took the trousers from her and tore them from the buttoned fly. "Underwear please."

Making sure the sheet didn't move, red-faced and grumbling, Cassandra removed her bra and then her panties. She swore under her breath as Harry tore her panties in half. "Git. What am I supposed to wear now?"

Harry dropped the destroyed clothing around the room. "As pissed as I'm supposed to be with the loss of my lover, and given the fact that I'm meant to be taking it out on your body, I'd say nothing."

"Given that fact, what took you so long to join me?" Cassandra queried Harry's hour long absence. "I'd have thought you'd have been chomping at the bit to do the dirty deed with me."

Harry smiled grimly. "Thomas' mention of Greyback reminded me that I had some unfinished business with him."

"What did he do?" Cassandra asked curiously.

"Questioned my authority." Harry didn't go into the exact details. "So I made him pay for that, and for insulting you."

"He insulted me?" Cassandra wondered what the werewolf had said.

"He's more than a little pissed that it won't be his bed you'll be sharing tonight." Harry had taken pleasure from the werewolf's frustration. "So he said that you'd probably have been a lousy lay anyway. So I tortured him until he begged for me to stop."

"Merlin, Harry." Cassandra was somewhat discomfited at how far Harry had gone. "Was that really necessary?"

"Cassandra, I don't want him anywhere near you, and I don't trust him to keep away." Harry shared one of his concerns. "So I had to let him know that you're my property, and what I'd do if he even so much as looks at you."

"My hero!" Cassandra retorted sarcastically, as she crooked her finger at Harry. "Now I think you deserve a little something for defending my virtue. Come here."

Harry moved over to where Cassandra was lying. "What are you planning to do?"

Cassandra grinned quite nastily. "I'm going to keep things on the realistic footing you wanted. And we both know that this piece of property wouldn't be taking tonight lying down. Now kneel."

Harry did as she demanded. "What now?"

"Brace yourself." Cassandra lashed out with her nails, drawing them down the side of Harry's face. "There. Is that nice and realistic enough for you?"

Harry reached up and touched the bloody gouges. "I suppose you did owe me for what I did to you in the ballroom."

"You're damn right, I did." Cassandra didn't argue with Harry's assessment. "Now, I think you're a little overdressed."

"To think all those years ago I'd have done anything to hear you say something like that." Harry laughed a little self-deprecatingly. "Now it's actually happening, I can't take advantage as I know your husband would kill me."

"And so would I, so just get on with it, Potter." Cassandra ordered, even as she smiled at him. "Before we have a visit from that bastard."

Harry headed into the bathroom and came out wearing a robe. "I'll get you a robe as well."

Cassandra lay back against the pillows, the covers tugged up to her chin, as Harry sat down on the small sofa. "I don't need one in here, and as you said, I doubt you'd be letting me wear anything."

"So what news do you have?" Tied up by Thomas and his demands, Harry hadn't managed to meet properly with Sirius for almost three weeks.

Cassandra was just telling him about some of the latest trainees, when a knock sounded at the outer door. "It looks as though you were right."

Harry unholstered his wand, and flicked it at Cassandra, causing a chain shackling her left arm to the bed to appear, and bruises to bloom around her throat. "Start crying."

Cassandra thought about her husband and what he might be doing, and the tears began to flow without too much effort. "Go get him."

Harry opened the bedroom door, headed into the sitting room, and unwarded the main door. "Come in."

Masked, Thomas and Regulus stepped into the room. Regulus glanced at Harry's face. "Did Cassandra do that you?"

"No, the tame kitten I keep in my bed did." Harry responded sarcastically. "Of course she did."

"So is she still in one piece?" Thomas wasn't sure how rough Harry had been with Cassandra, as even though she'd been married to Cedric, Cho had made it patently clear on more than one occasion that she, as well as Harry, preferred their mutual sexual encounters to be somewhat more strident than would be the case for most people.

"See for yourself." Harry indicated the open door to his bedroom.

Cassandra lifted her tear-stained and battered face up as she heard the two masked men enter the room. "Come to gloat?"

"Watch your mouth." Harry snarled at her. "Or I'll find a better use for it."

Cassandra immediately shut up, and dropped her head down again as she fought the almost insane urge to break out into nervous laughter at what she knew Harry was implying.

Thomas exercised no such restraint, and he did laugh. "I think I'll add this moment and an item of clothing to the gift basket I'm sending Sebastian." Thomas picked up Cassandra's ruined bra from the chair Harry had dumped it on, before stepping out of the bedroom. "Enjoy the rest of your evening."

"I intend to." Harry closed the bedroom door and escorted the two men to the main door. "I'll arrange for a bank draft to be delivered to you in the morning."

"Don't bother." Thomas opened the door. "As you pointed out, Sebastian owed you. Consider her a gift."

"Thank you." Harry inclined his head. "Goodnight, Thomas."

"Goodnight." Thomas responded. Regulus ignored Harry as they left.

Harry locked the door when they'd gone, before returning to join Cassandra.

Once Thomas reached his rooms, he turned to Regulus. "So what do you think?"

"Judging from the state of my niece, I'd say Potter has done exactly what he intimated he was going to." Even though he wasn't happy about what had happened to his niece, and had said as much to Thomas, Regulus gave what he believed to be an honest assessment of the situation. "But perhaps we should send Cammie in to talk to her."

"I agree." Thomas too believed that Harry had forced his attentions on Cassandra, but he still intended to make sure he wasn't being played. "Cammie can take her some clothes in a few days' time."

Several Days Later

Harry Potter appeared in the doorway of his bedroom, and was annoyed to see Cammie in the room with Cassandra. "What the fuck are you doing in here?"

Covered in just a sheet, Cassandra answered his question as she pointed behind her. "Cammie brought me some robes."

"You don't need them." Harry picked up the pile from the bed, and dropped them to the floor. "If and when I decide to let you wear clothes, then they'll be of my choosing."

"How can you treat her like that?" Cammie turned on Harry. "You're supposed to be her friend."

"There are no friends in war, Camille." Harry snaked his arm around Cassandra's waist, pulling her against him. "Only winners and losers."

"Get off me." Cassandra struggled momentarily, Harry's next words stopping her in her tracks.

"Don't force me to hurt you again, Cassandra." As Cassandra stilled, Harry lowered his head and kissed her neck, his hand cupping her breast over the sheet. He glanced at Cammie who was watching with a horrified look on her face. "As you can see, Camille, for all winners, there comes the spoils of wars. And as I intend to enjoy mine right now, unless you've any voyeuristic tendencies you've not shared with me and you want to watch, I suggest you fuck off."

Upset, Cammie turned and left the room. After releasing Cassandra, Harry headed across the room and closed the door. "Sorry about the manhandling."

"Harry, you don't have to apologize." Cassandra picked up the robes that Harry had dropped to the floor. "But I'm warning you now, if you ruin any of these to set a scene, I'll kill you."

Harry took one of the robes out of her hand and felt it, determining it was silk and extremely expensive. "I'll bear that in mind." Harry threw the robe back to Cassandra. "You should put this on." As he turned his back to let Cassandra cover herself up, he questioned her. "So what did Cammie have to say?"

"She'd only been here for a few minutes when you arrived." Cassandra had been surprised to see the girl at the door. "I don't really think she was here just to bring me clothes. I'd started to believe that she hadn't been turned by Thomas but now I'm not so sure given such an obvious ploy. You know what I think. Why do you think she came here?"

"To make sure that I'm truly loyal to Thomas." Harry assumed the same as Cassandra. "Let's hope I've convinced her."

After storming out of Harry's rooms, Cammie marched up the corridor to her Uncle's rooms, angry at what she'd just seen. Not bothering to bow to Thomas, she launched into a tirade. "I gave the robes to Aunt Cassandra as you told me to, but Potter came back and told me she didn't need them before threatening her and then molesting her in front of me." Cammie's face was filled with disgust.

"How did she look?" Thomas questioned.

"Her face is swollen from crying, she's got lovebites all over her neck, and she has fingerprints over her upper arms, so I'd say bloody awful." Cammie didn't bother to keep her tone respectful.

"You're angry with me, aren't you?" Thomas couldn't miss his niece's ire. "You can speak freely."

Cammie decided to make the most of the opportunity to answer Thomas' question. "I'm more than angry, Uncle Thomas. I'm disgusted that you could let Aunt Cassandra be used like a whore by him. You, like Potter, were supposed to be her friend."

"It's nothing personal per se." Thomas had been angry that Cassandra had opened fire on him, but as Mione had said to him, Cassandra had only been doing her job. "Well, nothing personal against Cassandra. It's more to get back at Sebastian."

"So was it about revenge for you or Potter when you let Potter buy her?" Cammie persisted. "Because it wasn't Uncle Harry's fault that Potter was bitten by him."

"Harry told you about that?" Thomas hadn't realized that Cammie knew about Harry's condition.

"I noticed that Potter had missed several meetings on the night of the full moon, and I knew you had another werewolf in addition to Greyback to do your dirty work, so I put two and two together." Cammie had confronted Harry Potter about what she believed.

"When I questioned Potter, he told me what Uncle Harry had accidentally done, and how much he hated my Uncle for not taking better precautions. He said that Uncle Harry had ruined his life, and that he'd pay for it."

"And he has now that Cassandra belongs to Harry." Thomas observed. "Cammie, while I know you're far from happy with my decision, at least Cassandra is alive. I was going to execute her outright but Mione refused to stand by and let me do so."

Cammie knew Thomas was going to use the opportunity to make yet another plea on Mione's behalf. "I'm still not seeing her even if she did defend Aunt Cassandra." Having said her piece, and aware that Thomas would punish her if she said anything derogatory about Mione, Cammie asked if she could go. "I've done your dirty work for you, so may I be excused?"

"You may." Thomas let Cammie go, and then apparated away himself, knowing that his wife would be disappointed that their niece had refused once more to see her.

Next Chapter: Harry Potter gets a shock; Remus visits the Island; Mione does something that Remus pays the price for.

Chapter 70: Madison Seville's Cunning Plan

15th October 2010

Remus suddenly became aware that Anna was talking to him. "I'm sorry, Anna. I was miles away."

"I asked if you'd like to take a walk along the beach." Anna had accompanied Remus when Mione had extended an invitation to stay with her and Thomas. Conscious of what kind of a man Thomas was, Anna had initially refused Remus' entreaty to go with him. However, when Harry Sebastian had asked if she'd accompany Remus as he wanted a non-biased opinion of how things appeared to be going between Thomas and Mione, she'd backpedaled and changed her mind.

"I'd like that." Remus put down his napkin, and rose to his feet. "Will you two excuse us?"

"We'll be in the billiards rooms." Mione preferred to keep her liaisons with Thomas located somewhere she didn't feel threatened, and she knew that the couple would join her to provide a buffer when they returned from their walk.

Remus followed Anna out, and once they were a good distance away from the house, he invoked a privacy spell for good measure. "So what do you think?"

"Even though she doesn't show it, she's as nervous as hell around him." Anna assessed what she'd observed. "But what confuses me is, that if I didn't know any better, I'd say she was very much in love with him."

"Then you don't know any better, because she is very much in love with him." Remus remarked in a tart voice. "I meant what do you think about how he's treating her? Do you think he suspects anything?"

"He's hard to judge but if I had to make a guess, I'd have to say no, he doesn't suspect a thing. And if a man treated me like Thomas treats Mione, I'd think I'd died and gone to heaven." Anna retorted in

just as tart a voice, before it changed to one of exasperation. "Remus, if I didn't know who he really was, I'd never have guessed. It's hard to believe that he's the same man who I know almost killed Harry's wife." Anna was finding it difficult to reconcile the monster she knew Thomas was with the urbane man who'd entertained them during dinner, and had played with his three children before then. "He's a wonderful father, and a brilliant host. He's witty, knowledgeable and makes a person feel at ease." She grinned cheekily. "And he's got us reservations at the most exclusive restaurant in Miami for tomorrow night."

"Are you sure you're not part of his Inner Circle?" Remus shook his head in dismay. "Harry is going to be so pissed at us. We're supposed to be trying to gauge how things are going, and instead we're letting Thomas turn our heads with fancy talk and dinner reservations."

"What else are we supposed to do?" Anna had, however, thought the same herself. "Short of pulling out our wands and trying to take him down, and I for one aren't ready to die just yet, we can do little but observe and report back."

"You're right, I suppose." Remus then changed the subject to Anna's attendance. "Thomas and Mione aside, are you here as part of your job or did you genuinely want to accompany me?"

"Part of my job." Anna's face became serious. "I saw how you looked at her that night she found out about Thomas, Remus."

"So that's why you've been avoiding me?" Remus had asked Anna out more than once since then but up until that weekend, she'd refused.

Anna acknowledged that it was. "I didn't want to get involved with a man who's pining after someone else."

"Good point." Remus had to allow her accurate comment. "But even though things haven't worked out between us in a romantic sense, I'd still like to continue to be your friend."

"I'd like that as well." Anna stared at Remus' face in the moonlight. "It's a pity because I could so easily have fallen for you."

"I'm glad you didn't as I'd never want to hurt you; you've been through enough already." Remus took Anna's hand, brushing his lips over her knuckles. "Anna, you're a beautiful woman, and I'm truly sorry that things didn't quite turn out as you'd hoped they might, but I'm glad that we can still be friends."

"Oh hell, Remus." Anna snatched back her hand. "Do you have any idea what that does to a woman?"

"I'm sure you're about to tell me." Remus had felt the slight shiver go through Anna at his touch.

"It makes me want to do this." Anna reached over with the hand she'd just snatched back, and wrapped it around the back of Remus' neck before pulling his head towards her in order to kiss him.

Remus immediately responded to the kiss, which soon began to get more than a little heated. "I thought we were just going to be friends."

"We are." Anna kissed him again, before taking a deep breath. "But I wanted just one more kiss."

Remus tugged her back against him, and covered her mouth with his own, feeling her melt against him. When they broke apart, he qualified his actions. "I thought it only fair that I get a final kiss as well."

"Can we just put the whole friends and final kiss thing off until we get back to London?" Anna knew that there was never going to be anything romantic between her and Remus, but after kissing him, she decided to throw caution to the wind, and indulge her somewhat baser needs.

Her intent became apparent to Remus as she started unbuttoning his shirt so that she could run her hands over his chest. "If that's what you want." Remus reached round and unzipped her dress.

"It is." After Anna's declaration, little was heard except quiet moans and soft cries as the two of them sank onto the soft sand and made love.

When Remus entered the billiards room a little while later on his way to his room, he found Mione sitting down and watching Thomas. "Are you not playing?"

"I am." Mione sighed heavily. "But Thomas isn't showing me any mercy." Her eyes widened as Remus started to walk past her. "Err, Remus."

Remus turned, affording Thomas the same view of his back that Mione had just been presented with. "Yes?"

"You might like to change your shirt." Mione suggested in an amused tone. "Your back has sand stains down it."

Reddening, Remus excused himself and headed out of the room.

Giving a shout of laughter, Thomas stepped back from the table. "I missed my shot because of you."

Mione jumped up and picked up her cue. "I had to get back on the table somehow."

"I could fluff a few shots for you if you'd prefer." Thomas couldn't take his eyes off Mione's bottom as she bent over the table to take her shot.

"I'd still lose." Mione took aim, and potted the red. "Yes!"

Thomas was amused by the happy look on his wife's face. "Which color?"

"Black." Mione decided.

"You'll miss." Thomas warned her, as he knew from experience that Mione's snooker skills were mediocre at best.

"Sh." Mione stuck her tongue between her teeth as she drew the cue back and made the shot. As the ball disappeared into the pocket, she lifted up from the table, her eyes shining brightly, and unthinkingly hugged her husband as she would have done before everything had gone so horribly wrong. "I did it, Thomas, I did it."

"I'm well aware of that." Thomas felt Mione stiffen as she suddenly realized what she'd done. "Don't pull away from me, Mione, please. It's been almost six months now, and this is the first time you've touched me like that without my instigating it."

"Thomas, I..." As she heard the plea in Thomas' voice, Mione made the mistake of looking into his eyes, and her words dried up.

As his wife fell silent, Thomas lowered his head and tentatively let his lips glide over hers. When she didn't pull away, Thomas kissed her a little more firmly, until eventually Mione opened her mouth to him, and Thomas was finally able to deepen the kiss.

A polite cough caused Mione to pull free, and she whirled around, her face burning when she discovered Remus and Anna standing there. Remus apologized. "We didn't mean to interrupt anything."

"It's quite alright, Remus." Thomas sent a loving smile at his wife. "It's nothing we can't pick up later."

Even though Mione didn't appear to bat an eyelid, Remus and Anna both felt her alarm at Thomas' words. Remus smiled politely. "Well, like I said, we didn't mean to interrupt you."

"You didn't." Mione replaced her snooker cue, her discomfort obvious. "I think I've taken enough of a beating for tonight. Remus, feel free to take my place but I suggest you re-rack the balls."

"Thank you." Remus selected a snooker cue as Thomas did as Mione had suggested.

The group spent the rest of the evening in the billiards room, teaming up at one point, with Mione and Remus being beaten hollow by

Thomas and Anna, who turned out to be a surprisingly good snooker player.

It was almost midnight when, after Remus had beat Thomas for the second and final time, Remus yawned. "I think it's time I headed for bed."

"I'll come with you." Anna bid goodnight to her hosts and followed Remus out.

Thomas held out his arm. "Can I walk you back to your room?"

Mione wanted to run but instead took Thomas' arm, and let him lead her down the corridor. Once they reached her room, she let go. "Well, goodnight."

"Mione." Thomas murmured her name before drawing her close and, as he had in the billiards room, began to gently kiss her before once more deepening the kiss.

The moment she felt Thomas' hand slide down her back to her bottom, Mione panicked and pulled away. "I'm sorry, Thomas. I just can't."

"Then I'll say goodnight." Thomas reverted to taking her hand and kissing it.

When Mione entered her bedroom, lying on the bed she found a silk scarf she'd admired in a shop window they'd passed when Thomas had taken her to lunch earlier in the week. Picking it up, Mione sat shakily on the bed next to the box the scarf had come in. She had thought that she'd be repulsed by kissing Thomas now that she knew who he was, and she was more than a little horrified to find that she'd enjoyed the kisses far too much for her own peace of mind. As she ran her fingertips over the silk scarf, she found herself wishing she'd listened to Remus, and had stayed hidden away.

Over the next few weeks, Mione reverted to being visibly nervous around Thomas again. Well aware that Mione was feeling guilty about

kissing him, Thomas didn't attempt to kiss his wife again, but simply went back to keeping his distance.

December 24th 2010

Disneyworld

Mione strolled along Main Street with Bella in a pushchair, Nat holding her hand and Maddie holding Thomas'. It felt surreal to her that, like any other family, they were just enjoying a normal day with their children. Mione's thoughts were interrupted. "Sorry, Thomas, I missed that."

"Maddie's starting to feel a little tired." Thomas repeated what he'd just said. "So let's go back to the villa for a while. She can take a nap."

Despite Maddie's protestations that she was too old for a nap, ten minutes later, courtesy of the monorail that operated around the park, the group found themselves back at the villa they were renting, and Mione and Thomas soon settled the children down into bed. Mione decided to take advantage of such a quiet time and take a shower. When she came out of the bathroom and re-entered the room she was sharing with her daughters, she discovered a small ring box sitting on her bed. Opening it, she gasped.

Thomas stood in the doorway. "Do you like it?"

Mione swung around. "It's beautiful. But you shouldn't have bought it for me, not with things the way are between us. I can't accept it."

"Yes, you can. I love you, and the ring is a token of that love." Thomas took the box from Mione. "The sapphire is one of a kind, like you."

Mione couldn't agree with his assessment. "I have someone in this world who is me."

Thomas disparaged Mione's comment. "Hermione Sebastian is a mere shadow of you; similar maybe, but never a true original. She

lacks your intelligence, your personality, and your outlook on the world. If H.J. hadn't come along, she'd have plodded on through life without achieving anything. She's a mouse compared to your tiger, Mione." Unbeknown to either of her parents, Maddie wasn't sleeping and was listening to their discourse, and she wondered what her parents had meant about her mother and Aunt Hermione.

While Mione knew that H.J. wouldn't agree with Thomas' description of his wife, Mione couldn't help but feel flattered by Thomas' compliment. "Thank you."

"You are more than welcome." Thomas took the ring out of the box. "Can I put it on?"

Mione hesitated, before nodding. "Yes."

Thomas knew why she'd not said yes immediately. "The ring is just that, Mione, a ring." He was pleased, however, that she'd agreed to let him place it on her finger. He then brushed his lips over Mione's.

Mione's stomach gave a jolt at the sensation, and she pulled away. "No."

Thomas immediately let go of her hand. "I only wanted a kiss."

"I'm sorry, Thomas." Mione wanted terribly to let him kiss her, but she was afraid of herself and her feelings, and where the kiss would lead if she did.

Thomas walked towards the door. "I'll leave you alone then."

After Thomas left, Mione sat down heavily on her bed. In her own bed, Maddie lay quietly, wondering what had happened between her parents. She'd find out the very next day.

Christmas Day - 5a.m.

Unable to sleep, Mione had showered, and had walked back into the bedroom to find Thomas waiting for her, another box in his hands.

When she'd opened the box, Mione had found earrings to match the ring he'd given her yesterday. "Thank you."

"Aren't you going to put them on?" Thomas asked in a quiet voice so that he wouldn't wake his daughters. However, as with the previous day, Maddie was awake, her mother's movements rousing her from her sleep.

"Not right now." Mione stepped away and walked over to her closet, coming out a few minutes later with two gifts. "These are for you."

"Considering what you said yesterday, I didn't expect you to buy me anything." Thomas unwrapped the first gift from Mione, and discovered it was two tickets to a play he'd mentioned he was interesting in seeing.

"It's Christmas." Mione explained why she'd bothered to buy something for her husband. "And I think the Muggle belief is that on this day there should be peace and goodwill to all men, which includes you." Lying in her bed, Maddie frowned at the underlying hostility in her mother's voice.

Thomas unwrapped his second gift, and turned it over in his hands. "A first edition of a Christmas Carol? Did you buy this because I'm missing it from my Dickens collection, or because you're hoping that I'll change as Scrooge does when faced with the errors of his ways?"

"You decide." Mione left it up to Thomas to provide the answer to his question.

Knowing his wife as he did, Thomas came to the correct conclusion. "Mione, I'm not going to change who I am and what I'm seeking just because of a Muggle moralistic book."

"Not even for me?" Mione challenged Thomas' oft used statement that he'd do anything for her.

"I'm doing what I am for you, for us." Thomas wanted Mione to see things from his point of view. "When I succeed, we can be together forever."

"People aren't supposed to live forever, Thomas." Mione put forth her opinion. "And I should know that better than most. I was given a second chance but that doesn't mean I have the right to extend that chance so that it stretches on into eternity." Maddie wondered what her mother meant by second chance.

"Whether or not that's true, I have no intention of dying, and no intention of letting you pass on either." Thomas took his wife's hand in his. "Mione, think of the good you could do with my money if you were to live on past your allotted time."

"Think of the damage we both know you'll do if you achieve immortality." Mione countered Thomas' example. "And I'm not sure how I'm going to be able to deal with it if you do."

Thomas led Mione to sit down on the small sofa that was in the bedroom. "You feel strongly about this, don't you?"

"How angry are you going to get if I'm completely open with you?" Mione couldn't deny that she was more than a little afraid of her husband.

"As I often say to Cammie, you have permission to speak freely." Thomas wanted to know exactly how his wife felt.

"Then I'll be candid with you." Mione met Thomas' eyes, and said what she'd wanted to for months. "Thomas, what you're doing isn't natural or right, and I wouldn't be the person I am if I didn't make every effort to stop you."

"There's only way to stop me, Mione." Thomas released his wife's hand, and withdrew his wand, handing it over to his wife. "Go ahead. I won't try and defend myself."

Mione shakily took Thomas' wand from him, and pointed it at him. "Avada..." Maddie barely stopped herself from gasping out loud as she heard Mione begin to incant the killing curse. Relief coursed through her as her mother's next words reached her ears.

"You know I can't do it, Thomas, even though I should." Mione lowered the wand.

"Then perhaps you're not as moralistic as you'd like to think you are." Thomas took his wand back. "Mione, I know that what I want isn't your ideal but we all have dreams in life. And all I'm asking is that you be a willing part of mine."

"I can't, Thomas." Mione held out the earrings, and the ring that she'd just slid off. "I think you should take these back." She looked down at her wedding and engagement rings that she was unable to remove. "And if I could take these off as well I would."

Thomas was stunned by Mione's statement. "Are you saying that you don't love me anymore?" At that point, Maddie felt her heart skip a beat, before she relaxed at her mother's response.

"No." Mione wasn't about to lie. "But I am saying that I'm finding it difficult being married to you, and that I don't want expensive jewelry. It makes me feel as if you're trying to buy my affection back."

Thomas hadn't thought about it like that when he'd bought the gifts for Mione. "Your niece accused me of the very same thing. And as I said to her, if I thought I could guarantee love via monetary means, then I'd do it. However, the jewelry was to show you how much I loved you, and had no other intended purpose."

Mione looked wistfully at the items in her hand. "They are beautiful."

Thomas could sense she was wavering. "Mione, please accept them."

"I can't. It wouldn't be right; not while I feel the way I do." Mione enfolded the jewelry in her fist, still not quite ready to let them go.

A gesture that Thomas noticed. "Mione, you said that you wanted to be open, so please, be open with me."

"Okay." Mione met Thomas' gaze. "I've tried to be pragmatic about how things have turned out. Because I love you, I've told myself that I

should accept you for what you are; that I should ignore what you've done; that I should do as you do and separate you from Dominus, but it's too difficult." Thomas went to say something, only for Mione to stop him. "Please let me finish. And the reason that I can't accept this jewelry is because, even though I feel about you the way I do, I don't believe I'm entitled to it. Thomas, when I think about what you are and what that means, I often think about leaving you; of leaving this marriage and all of its pitfalls behind."

Thomas challenged his wife. "Why haven't you then, if your morals are so offended by what I am?"

"Because I have to protect my friends." Mione finally owned up to one of the reasons she'd really returned to Thomas. "And if staying with you means that I could save just one of them, then putting up with what you are is worth it."

Thomas could feel his happiness draining away. "So you didn't ask to remain cognizant of who I am for me; you did it for your friends. So much for saying you love me."

Mione looked down at the gifts that Thomas hadn't taken back. "Thomas, my friends are only part of the reason I didn't want to obliterated. Another reason is that I love you more than I could have thought it possible to love a person, and I couldn't bear to go through finding out the truth like that again. But just because I love you, it doesn't mean that I'm not offended and upset by what you're doing. I am, and I always be, and because of that, I will always do my best to defend my friends against you, and to protect my children from becoming involved in the unsavory part of your life." Maddie wondered what part of her father's life she couldn't be a part of.

Thomas mulled over what Mione had admitted. "I'd rather you were here just for the children's and my sakes, but I understand why you feel the need to defend your friends. However, as long as you truly love me, I can live with that. Yet I still need to know something."

"What?" Mione found her eyes meeting Thomas', as he used his hand to tilt her head up so that he was looking into her eyes.

Thomas knew that his question would be hard for his wife to answer. "Before I ask the question, I just want you to know that I would never drag our children into the part of my life I live as Dominus, not unless I have very good reason to do so." Maddie frowned as the name 'Dominus' came up again, and she scrunched her forehead as she tried to recall where she'd heard it before.

"I will never accept that you will have good reason to do so." Mione wanted Thomas to understand that she'd fight him tooth and nail before she'd let him induct their children in his world.

Thomas accepted her statement. "I understand that. But my question is, that given how you feel about your friends, if you had to choose between them and me, who would you choose?"

Mione tried to avoid answering the question. "That's not a fair question, Thomas."

"Maybe not, but we both know that one day it's likely to come down to them or me, so I need an answer." Thomas wasn't going to let Mione get away with not responding.

Silence reigned for several minutes as Mione struggled with her feelings, but in the end she answered her husband truthfully. "Merlin forgive me, but I'd choose you. Nevertheless, it wouldn't stop me from appealing to your better nature for them."

Thomas looked thoughtfully at his wife. "You wouldn't be the woman I love if you didn't, but my better nature only exists for you, my children and Cammie. However, as we're being honest I have to tell you that, even for you, I'm only willing to go so far in showing clemency." While she understood a lot of words, Maddie didn't know what clemency was, so this part of the conversation was lost on her.

"You've already proven that." Mione didn't bother to hide her disapproval of what had happened to Cassandra. "And while we're being honest, I want you to know that I hate you for what you did to Cassandra." Maddie was aware that her aunt had been kidnapped in a fight, and it was then that Maddie remembered where she'd heard the name 'Dominus'. Putting two and two together and coming up

with four, Maddie had to bite down on her fist to stop herself from crying out in dismay.

"I know you do." Thomas didn't expect anything else. "But at least she's alive, if not particularly happy."

Mione spotted a strange look cross her husband's face. "What aren't you telling me? Cassandra is okay, isn't she?"

Thomas said that she was and went on further. "Cassandra currently has the run of the house. She doesn't have a Dark Mark, so she can't escape, but there are certain times when she's confined to Harry's rooms; times when Fenrir Greyback is around. Everyone else knows that Cassandra is Harry's property and leaves her alone. However, Greyback wants her, and despite Harry's attempts to prevent him from pursuing Cassandra, he hasn't given up on her." Maddie wondered who Harry was as she knew it wasn't her Uncle Harry that her father was talking about, and she also believed that it couldn't be Harry Potter because he lived with her Aunt Hermione and Uncle H.J.

"Can't you do anything about him?" Mione asked in a dismayed voice as she understood what her husband was trying to tell her.

"Like Harry, he has a purpose he serves for me." Thomas didn't go into detail.

Mione swallowed. "On the night of the full moon, you mean?"

"Yes." Thomas could see that the conversation was upsetting his wife. "And it's those qualities that make him pursue Cassandra as he does. He doesn't want Cassandra due to the fact that he's in love with her but because she's another werewolf's property, and he intends to dominate her. I've punished him myself, but he's not like most people. He doesn't really fear anyone or anything, not even me."

"You mean he's mentally unbalanced?" Even Mione herself had a healthy dose of fear when it came down to her husband.

"Yes." Thomas confirmed Mione's question, and then made an offer. "Mione, if you want me to, I can remove Cassandra's only worry at Castrum House apart from me."

Mione caught onto Thomas' intention. "You'd kill him?"

"If you asked me to, yes." Thomas knew he was placing his wife in an uncomfortable position. As she listened to her father offering to kill someone, Maddie began to cry silent tears.

"Thomas, can't you let Cassandra go?" Mione already knew that he was going to say no, but she had to ask, given the alternative.

"I can't." Thomas was unable to let Cassandra leave. "I'd have to oblivate her if I did to protect Harry's identity, and given Sebastian's skills with the mind arts, he'd break through what I've done."

"How about asking her to swear an oath?" Mione suggested.

"She'd refuse." Thomas was aware of how stubborn Cassandra was; the bruises he believed Harry Potter had inflicted on her, bearing witness to her nature. "So I can't let her go. But if you ask me to, I can remove the danger."

Mione was now facing a serious moral dilemma, and she thought about a monster like Greyback inflicting himself on Cassandra, and what it would do to her. Biting her lip, Mione hoped she could live with what she was going to say. "If it keeps Cassandra safe, then I want you to do it."

Suddenly Nat's voice floated in. "Mummy?"

Wanting to be away from Thomas and her own thoughts, Mione got to her feet. "I'll go get him up."

Before rejoining his wife, Thomas checked on Bella to find her still sleeping, and stepping over to Maddie's bed, he discovered that she wasn't, as her frightened and tear-filled eyes met his own. "You were awake?"

"I'm sorry, Daddy. I didn't mean to listen." Maddie was terrified she was going to be in serious trouble.

Holding out his arms, Thomas made a request. "Come here, Mads. Daddy needs to talk to you." Maddie let Thomas pick her up and carry her into the bathroom.

Thomas closed the door behind him, and set up a silencing spell, noticing his daughter flinch as he withdrew his wand. "It's just so that we don't wake up Bella. Mads, how much did you hear?"

"Everything." Maddie answered in a frightened voice.

"It's okay, angel, I'm not angry with you, and I'm not going to hurt you." Thomas kept his voice gentle.

Maddie responded well to his unthreatening tone. "You're really not angry with me for listening?"

Thomas realized then that his daughter was more afraid of being told off than she was of anything else. "Of course I'm not. It's my fault for not talking to your mother in the sitting room."

Maddie had never heard her father say that anything was his fault before. "So you're not going to smack me?"

For all of his willingness to punish others, Thomas didn't really believe in corporal punishment as far as his children were concerned. "Have I ever smacked you?"

"No." Maddie admitted. "But Mummy has." Mione had occasionally administered a gentle swat across her daughter's bottom when she'd pushed her too far.

Thomas was only too well aware of how annoying his eldest daughter could be sometimes, but he knew he was partially to blame for spoiling her. "Mummy's never hurt you doing it, has she?"

Mione's gentle swats had done little more than shock her daughter. "No, Daddy."

"I didn't think so." Thomas then turned the conversation back to what Maddie had overheard. "You know who I really am, don't you?"

"Dominus." Maddie voiced the name she'd heard.

"I'm sorry you had to find out like this." Thomas debated obliterating his daughter, and decided he had to. "Maddie, I'm going to make it so that you don't remember."

"Why?" Maddie questioned her father's decision.

"Because I made you afraid of me, and I don't want that." Thomas stroked his daughter's wet face; he was glad to see, however, that she'd stopped crying. "I love you so much, Mads, and I'd never, ever hurt you."

Not knowing what Thomas would do to make her forget, Maddie nervously asked a question. "Daddy, what if I wasn't scared of you?"

"But you were." Thomas couldn't miss how rigidly his daughter had held herself.

"But I'm not now." Maddie answered her father truthfully. "And I was only scared because I thought I was going to get into trouble."

Thomas realized his initial hunch was correct about his daughter's fear. "Maddie, what you overheard wasn't your fault, but you still shouldn't have had to hear it, and that's why you have to forget."

"Daddy, is Mummy going to leave?" A very bright young girl, Maddie decided to try and divert Thomas' attention away from taking her memories from her.

"No, Mads." Thomas assured his daughter. "She'd never leave."

Maddie continued to question her father about her mother, and the conversation she'd overheard. "Daddy, will you let Mummy try and kill you again?"

"Absolutely not." Thomas knew why his daughter was asking. "I knew that she wouldn't do it when I told her to; I was just trying to prove a point to your mother."

"And you really love Mummy and she really loves you?" Maddie asked, wanting reassurance about the state of her parents' marriage.

"Mummy loves me very much, and I love Mummy more than the whole world, and would never do anything to hurt her." Thomas had no idea at that moment that he was eventually going to end up revoking his words.

"But you're going to kill Greyback, aren't you?" Maddie showed her father that she'd been listening carefully.

Thomas was aware that his daughter was far from stupid, and so he didn't lie to her. "I am."

"But you won't hurt Auntie Cassandra, will you?" Maddie voiced a fear that had been running through her since Cassandra's name had come up in her parents' conversation, and she understood what had happened to her aunt.

"Mads, Cassandra hurt me first." Thomas tried to avoid saying yes.

"But I expect she's sorry now." Maddie assumed that Cassandra would show the same type of regret she did when she'd been caught doing something wrong.

"She is." Thomas could once again answer truthfully.

"Daddy, can't you let Auntie Cassandra go then?" Maddie had already heard Thomas say no, but she decided it couldn't hurt to ask again. "Uncle Harry misses her lots. I heard Mummy say so."

"And you heard what I told Mummy about why I can't let Cassandra go, didn't you?" Thomas stroked his daughter's head when she nodded, before refusing. "I'm sorry but I can't do it, angel."

"Did you hurt Auntie Cassandra when she hurt you?" Maddie, like her mother, was tenacious in every sense of the word, and she stuck with the conversation of her missing aunt.

"I did." Thomas didn't lie to Maddie.

"But you only did it because she hurt you first, didn't you?" Maddie wanted to know that Thomas hadn't just done it for the sake of it. "Like when I fight with Nat?"

"Yes." Thomas didn't go into the more far reaching aspects of the reasons that he and Cassandra had been fighting. "And Cassandra only hurt me because she was doing her job."

"So if she's locked up and can't do her job, then you won't have to hurt her again, will you? You said she was sorry, and you always say that if you're really sorry, then that makes it alright." Maddie smiled ingenuously at her father.

Whereas Mione's pleas hadn't worked with Thomas, his young daughter's obvious trust in him to do the right thing did. "I promise I won't hurt her again, but I can't let her go."

Maddie still hadn't quite finished. "And you won't let Greyback hurt her?"

"You've already heard what I'm going to do to him." Thomas raised his wand. "And because of that I have to make you forget now."

"Please don't, Daddy." Maddie begged, more than a little afraid it would hurt. "I promise I won't tell anyone."

"I have to, Mads. You know what I've done to your aunt, and what your mother wants me to do to Greyback." Thomas reminded his daughter.

"But I know you only did it because Auntie Cassandra hurt you, and that you're going to stop Greyback because he is going to hurt her." Maddie's fear of the unknown obliteration and what it might entail,

overrode everything else as she pleaded with her father. "Please, Daddy, I'll pinkie swear not to tell anyone, not even Uncle Harry."

"Pinkie swear?" Thomas had heard the phrase before, but he wondered where his daughter had.

Maddie filled him in. "Siri told me that when he and Auntie Faith have a secret, they pinkie swear never to tell anyone else."

Thomas was amused by his daughter's serious face. "And has Siri ever told you any of these secrets?"

Maddie's face grew even more serious. "He can't. If he does, then a bogie man will come in the night and suck out his brains."

Thomas had the feeling that the bogie man his daughter was talking about was more than likely him. "So if we pinkie swore, and I told your mother what we'd talked about, then my brains would be sucked out?"

"Yes." Maddie, who for all of her brilliance and easy grasp of situations, showed her true age by her absolute belief in what Siri Black had told her. She held out her hand, her tiny finger outstretched. "It will be our secret, Daddy."

Given their conversation of a few minutes ago, Thomas knew how angry Mione would be if she discovered what he was about to do. "So what do I have to do?"

"Wrap your little finger around mine." Maddie instructed her father, a small thrill going through her when she realized that Thomas wasn't going to force her to forget, and that she was going to share a secret with the father she adored. "Then say that you pinkie swear to keep our secret."

Thomas did as he was instructed, before Maddie did the same. "Maddie, if Mummy ever finds out what we've done she's going to be very angry with me; so angry that she might leave."

"Don't worry. I can't tell her anything, Daddy." Maddie assured her father in a lofty voice. "Because Mummy said I'm very intelligent, and that I'm going to need all of my brains if I'm going to run the Corporation when I'm old enough, and if I tell her our secret, then my brains will be sucked out."

As she tried to reassure him, Thomas could see that his daughter had relaxed, and he was surprised how easily she'd accepted what she'd overheard, once she'd was sure that nothing bad was going to happen to Cassandra or her parents' marriage. "You certainly will need those brains if you want to come to work with me."

Maddie's easy acceptance came from the fact that despite what she'd overheard, she trusted and adored her father, and had absolutely no idea how much deeper the implications of her father's true identity went. "When can I go to work with you?"

Maddie had been nagging Thomas to take her to work with him ever since she'd first understood what it meant. Up until then, Thomas had always refused. "I have to go to work on New Year's Eve. I'll take you then."

"Thank you, Daddy." Maddie threw her arms around Thomas' neck, before moving onto a more pertinent subject for the day. "Is it time for presents yet?"

"After breakfast." Glad that some sort of normality had been restored, Thomas kissed his daughter's nose. "Now get showered and meet me in the dining rom."

"Don't forget, Daddy." Maddie warned her father in a very stern tone. "You've pinkie swore. And there will be no-one to run the Corporation if you get your brains sucked out."

"I won't forget, Mads." Thomas let himself out of the bathroom, wondering if he'd made the right choice or not. Deciding he could always oblivate his daughter at a later date if necessary, his attention was diverted by Bella, who'd just woken up.

New Year's Eve

Maddie was wide-eyed as Thomas led her through the offices of the corporate building in New York. "Daddy, do all of these people work for you?"

Thomas smiled down at his daughter. "Yes. They used to work for your Grandad but when he retired, he signed over the Corporation to me."

"And when I'm old enough, will they be working for me?" Maddie smiled back at a woman who'd smiled at her.

"They will." Thomas opened the door to his office, and greeted the man waiting for him. "Reg, did you have a good holiday?"

"I did." Regulus shook hands with Thomas before turning his attention to the young girl. "Hello, Maddie."

"Hi, Uncle Regulus." Maddie hugged the man she knew was her father's best friend. Suddenly realizing what that might mean, she turned to her father. "Daddy, can I ask you something?"

"What is it?" Thomas glanced over from where he'd sat down to go over the mass of post that was sitting on his desk.

"It's a secret." Maddie didn't want Regulus overhearing.

"Come here." Thomas could see his daughter was almost bursting to ask whatever was on her mind.

Maddie headed over to Thomas and whispered in his ear. "Daddy, does Uncle Regulus know who you really are?"

"Regulus knows that I'm Dominus." Thomas spoke out loud.

Regulus couldn't hide his shocked response. "She knows?"

"Can I tell him?" Thomas kept up his daughter's faith in the pinkie swear by checking with her first.

"Yes, Daddy." Maddie confirmed.

Not wanting Maddie to hear what Regulus might say, Thomas turned to his daughter. "Maddie, sit down and read your book while I talk to Uncle Regulus."

"Okay, Daddy." Maddie got out the latest book Mione had picked for her to read, and sat obediently on the large sofa in the corner of her father's office.

Thomas invoked a privacy bubble before explaining what his daughter had overheard. "If Mione finds out what I've done, despite the fact that I know she's afraid of me on some level, she'll go ballistic. She made it perfectly clear that Maddie wasn't to have anything to do with my life as Dominus. But given that Maddie seems to be able deal with what she's heard so far, I'm willing to take that chance."

Regulus wasn't so sure it was a good idea. "Maddie's only got to say one wrong word to the right person, Thomas."

"She won't." Thomas explained about the pinkie swear. "Funnily enough she's more scared about what would happen to her if she went back on her promise than she is of what she's learnt about me."

"But why now?" Regulus questioned Thomas' motives. "Why not wait until she's older?"

"Because she's accepted that I'm not just 'Daddy'." Thomas had talked more to his daughter in private since she'd first discovered who he was. "She knows what I'm trying to do, and while she doesn't yet grasp the wider implications of it, she's quite taken with the idea of immortality."

"Show me a seven year old that wouldn't be." Regulus couldn't help but disparage Thomas' remarks. "It's not just that. Maddie worships the ground you walk on, and if you told her that the moon was pink, she'd believe you. She's too young, Thomas."

"I'm not changing my mind." Thomas refused to listen to his friend.

Regulus tried once more to get Thomas to see reason. "Thomas, at her age she should be playing with dolls, and not having to deal with the burdens that the truth about you will inflict upon her."

"Regulus, she may be only seven, and, I have to admit, a little naive sometimes, but she's not stupid. Her reading age is the same as an eleven year old's; her grasp of maths is even better, to say nothing of her problem solving skills." Thomas then revealed his biggest secret. "But that's not all. When we first discovered Nat's problems, we had both children tested on the Magus scale. Nat barely registered twenty."

Regulus winced, knowing that Thomas' son had just enough magic inside of him to qualify him as a wizard and not a squib. "And Maddie?"

"She registered eighty-five." Thomas could see he'd surprised his friend. "And that was at three years of age. I had her tested before I brought her here." Thomas hesitated before telling his friend what his daughter had registered. "I register at four hundred and fifty-six, and Mione registers at two hundred and sixty-four. What about you?"

Regulus had known that Thomas was powerful; he hadn't realized just how powerful until then. "Two hundred and twenty-two."

"Maddie now registers at two hundred and fourteen." Thomas couldn't help but feel proud of his daughter. "She's already almost as powerful as you are, and I suspect that one day she'll surpass even me."

"Merlin, Thomas." Regulus could see why Thomas wanted Maddie in his corner, but he still felt uneasy about Maddie's involvement. "So when will you take her to Castrum House?"

"Soon but I want to talk more to her about my life as Dominus before she meets my followers." Thomas wasn't about to expose his daughter until he felt she was truly ready.

"How much have you told her?" Regulus enquired.

Thomas filled him in. "She knows what I'm capable of but not the extent that I would go to, nor is she aware that I've already killed."

"I have an idea." Regulus decided to try and take some of the pressure off Thomas; more for Maddie's sake though than for his friend's. "Drop the bubble."

Thomas released the spell so that Maddie could hear their conversation again. "What is it you want to say?"

"Do you want me to deal with Greyback?" Regulus offered to take the responsibility from Thomas.

"No." Thomas realized what his friend was trying to do, and thought of a better way to deal with Greyback that would take the onus off his friend as well. "Just tell Simus that the next time Greyback goes too far, he can take extreme measures to deal with him."

"So you're not going to kill him, Daddy?" Listening now that her father had ended his spell, Maddie quickly latched onto what Thomas' words meant.

"I'm not." Thomas could see his answer had made Maddie happy. "You're glad, aren't you?"

"Yes. I don't want you to ever have to kill anyone, not even to make Auntie Cassandra safe." While Maddie now knew that Thomas had kidnapped her aunt, up until then she'd been sheltered from the ugly truth about her father's alter ego by both of her parents, and she therefore hadn't seen any newspaper reports about some of Thomas' more distasteful acts.

Thomas and Regulus exchanged telling looks. Thomas didn't want to lie to his daughter, so before Maddie could go on, he instead made a request of Regulus. "Reg, I have a few phone calls I need to make. Would you mind taking Maddie for a better look around the office? She's got her swimming costume in her backpack, so if at the end of the tour, you want to take her to the health center downstairs, she can play in the pool. I'll meet you both in a couple of hours, and then we'll go to lunch."

Regulus held out his hand. "Come on, Maddie. As well as having a key to the swimming pool, I also know where the vending machines are."

"What's a vending machine?" Maddie had never heard the term before.

Regulus' answer was lost as the door closed, and Thomas got down to the business he had at hand.

Later that evening

Over the holidays Maddie had taken to watching her parents' carefully, and she couldn't help but notice that her mother was continually glancing at her father when she thought he wasn't looking. Remembering what her father had told her about how much her parents really did love each other, she'd hatched a plan. On her return from New York with Thomas, she'd begged her parents to let her stay up to see in the New Year as a special treat. The moment the clock struck twelve, Maddie kissed both of her parents, and then instigated the first step of her plan. "Mummy, you have to kiss Daddy as well."

"I can kiss Daddy in a little while." Mione immediately responded.

"No." Maddie stubbornly folded her arms. "It's New Year right now, and you kissed me. Now you have to kiss Daddy."

Thomas walked over to his wife. "So, Mione, do I get a New Year's kiss?"

Not wanting to explain to her daughter why she was reluctant to kiss Thomas, Mione leant forward intending only to peck Thomas on the lips. Her plans were thwarted when Thomas enfolded her in his arms, and the kiss became anything but a brief encounter. Watching her parents kissing, Maddie felt a deep sense of satisfaction.

Mione couldn't look at Thomas when he finally let go of her. "I'll take Maddie up to bed."

"It's okay, I'll take her." Thomas picked Maddie up and apparated them out of the room. As he tucked his daughter into bed, he gave her a knowing look. "You did that on purpose, didn't you?"

"Yes." Maddie knew it would be a waste of time lying to her father; somehow he always knew when she did. "I want you and Mummy to be like you were before."

"You shouldn't have done it, but I'm glad you did." Thomas kissed his daughter's cheek. "Happy New Year, Mads."

"Happy New Year, Daddy." Maddie climbed into bed and feeling happy, was asleep within moments.

As Thomas apparated to his room, aware that it would be futile to return to the sitting room as Mione would have already fled to her own bedroom, he wondered what else his daughter was going to do to try and ensure he and Mione stayed together. He found out over the course of the next six months as his daughter employed every opportunity she could to force Mione into his arms.

14th May 2011

Maddie sighed heavily as she sat on her mother's bed. "Mummy, may I have a cold drink, please?"

Have retired early, Mione had been joined by her daughter complaining it was too hot to sleep. "Let's go into the kitchen." Mione took her daughter's hand, and headed for the kitchen, only to give a small scream as she cannoned into a warm body.

Thomas spelled on the lights. "Are you alright?"

"You startled me." Mione went to the fridge which, although it looked like a standard Muggle fridge, was really powered by magic. "Would you like something to drink?"

"I was just about to have a cold beer." Thomas too was feeling the heat in the exceptionally warm night.

"May I have an orange juice, Mummy?" Maddie put in her order.

"I'll join you." Mione turned and passed a beer over to Thomas, before pouring juice out for her and her daughter.

Thomas took a long pull at his bottle, eschewing the glass he'd normally use. "That's good."

Mione agreed as she took a mouthful of her juice. "I'd better take Maddie back to bed now otherwise neither of us will get up in the morning."

"Come and sit out on the verandah with me." Thomas held out his hand. "There's a bit of a breeze on the side where my bedroom is."

"That's okay." Mione was about to refuse.

Maddie didn't let her. "I think it's a good idea, Mummy." She took her mother's hand. "Daddy's verandah will be lovely and cool."

"Just for five minutes then." Mione let her daughter tug her along. "I wonder how Regulus is doing on the other side of the house."

"I'm sure that he's just as capable as we are of casting a cooling spell." Thomas remarked, not really caring about his friend's comfort at that moment.

Once they'd gotten outside, Maddie spotted that there were only two loungers set up. "Sit with Daddy, Mummy."

Thomas didn't give his wife a chance to argue, and wrapping his fingers around her wrist pulled her down to join him on the oversized lounger.

Maddie promptly got to her feet. "I'm off to bed; I feel much cooler now."

Mione turned to her husband as her daughter left. "Is it my imagination or is Maddie constantly trying to manufacture situations so that we can be together?"

"She's not stupid, Mione." Thomas defended his daughter's actions. "She can see that things aren't going well between us, and this is her way of trying to make it right."

"But it isn't going to make things right." Mione went to get up, only for Thomas to stop her. "Thomas, let go of my wrist."

"Is it too much to ask that you spend a little time with me?" Thomas released his hold as Mione sank back down. "Mione, I know how difficult all this has been for you, and I've accordingly held off from applying pressure to you. But I want my wife back in the whole sense of the word."

"I'm still not ready to take that step." Mione had expected to have this conversation months earlier.

"Will you at least let me kiss you, and maybe hold you occasionally?" Thomas decided to see how far Mione was willing to bend.

Mione knew how patient Thomas had been with her, and even though she was nervous about just letting him do that much, she relented. "As long as that's all that it is."

"It will be." Thomas promised. "And now I'll let you go to bed."

Mione was confused. "You're not going to kiss me?"

"Do you want me to?" Thomas asked.

"Not right now." Mione climbed to feet and hurried away.

Lying back on the lounge, his beer in his hand, Thomas smiled to himself as he knew that Mione had finally begun to break down, thanks to his daughter and what she called her 'cunning plan'.

Next Chapter: Harry Potter gets a shock; Maddie's plan comes to fruition; Thomas discovers Mione in a compromising position.

Chapter 71: The Beginning of the End

4th November 2011

Cassandra took a mouthful of tea as she chatted with Cammie, who'd become a regular visitor. Cassandra still wasn't sure if she trusted her though, but had agreed to accept Cammie's visits in the hope that she might find something useful out. She turned the conversation towards Thomas. "Every time you come to see me, I always find myself surprised that Dominus lets you do so."

Cammie didn't know that Cassandra was aware of who Dominus really was. "He grants me more latitude than most. In the same vein, I'm surprised Potter lets me visit you."

"I, err, agreed to stop resisting him, and submit to his demands if he allowed you to visit me." Cassandra lied, making sure she looked uncomfortable.

"So that's why the bruises and marks have vanished." Cammie had noticed that they'd grown fewer over time.

"It is. I was getting nowhere by resisting him, and so, with the end result being the same no matter what I did, I stopped fighting." Cassandra and Harry had agreed to diminish the bruises bit by bit, neither one wanting to raise suspicions by having him suddenly stop appearing to be treating her so badly. "And my submission served more than one purpose; it meant you could visit, and that I was no longer getting hurt."

Cammie lifted her hand and pushed her hair from her face, genuine concern marring her features. "I'm so sorry you're going through this."

Cassandra was about to answer when she couldn't help but stare at the large exquisitely cut amethyst on Cammie's wedding finger. She'd noticed it before but hadn't seen it up close until then. "That's some ring. I meant to ask before, Cammie, are you engaged?"

"Not exactly." Cammie touched the ring almost reverently. "But it was given to me by someone special."

"He must care about you a great deal." Cassandra couldn't take her eyes off the stunning ring.

"He loves me." Cammie's face had a strange look on it as she responded.

"And do you love him?" Cassandra thought Cammie's response was a little odd as she looked almost guilty rather than happy.

"Yes." Cammie's answer was cautious.

"You don't sound sure." Cassandra discerned a note of hesitance in Cammie's response.

"I do love him but I'm afraid to say I'm in love with him." Cammie revealed the reason for looking so guilty. "But he understands."

Cassandra began to dig. "Is it because of Potter you can't tell him?"

"Yes." Cammie closed her eyes as she thought about Harry. "I thought I knew him, but when I look at you I'm reminded that he's not the person he once was."

Cassandra grimaced. "Tell me something I don't know. He now reminds of the boy he was at Hogwarts."

"He told me what he was like at school." Cammie remembered the conversations she'd shared with Harry. "And like you've just said, it's as if he's reverted back to that Harry; nasty, vindictive and hurtful."

"And he's hurt you, hasn't he?" Cassandra continued probing.

"So very much." Cammie's voice grew soft as she thought back over time. "And now I'm scared of letting anyone in like that again."

"How did he hurt you?" Cassandra hoped that Cammie would continue to open up to her.

She didn't. "It doesn't matter now. I've made my choice just as he's made his." Cammie smile was full of regret as she abruptly changed the subject.

After Cammie had left, Cassandra spent most of the afternoon contemplating what she'd learnt, and when Harry returned she made a request of him. "I need you to do something for me when you next leave the castle."

"What is it?" Harry thought his friend looked tired.

Cassandra gave him instructions. "Bring me back a portrait that hangs in Dad's family gallery. It's the ninth one from the left on the top row."

Harry's curiosity was piqued. "What do you want it for?"

"I'll tell you when I've seen it." Cassandra selected a robe. "Right now I'm off to take a shower."

"I'll arrange for some dinner for you." Harry pulled on his cloak. "Don't leave these rooms as Greyback is around." The werewolf unfortunately hadn't done anything yet that could lead to Harry being able to take the final step that Thomas had said he could. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Where are you going?" Cassandra noted the outdoor wear.

"To kill two birds with one stone; I'm going to get your portrait, and I have a meeting with Uncle Sirius." Harry's meeting was scheduled to take place with Sirius in less than ten minutes. "I only dropped by to make sure you were okay. I'll see you later."

Cassandra stopped him going. "Give a message to Dad and Harry. Tell them I love them and miss them."

"I will do." Harry kissed Cassandra's cheek. "Now don't forget what I've said. I'll be back soon." Five minutes after leaving Castrum House, Harry apparated into Grimmauld Place to report in to his godfather. He didn't really have anything to tell him except that

Cassandra was still alright but to Sirius that news alone was worth Harry's visit. Hearing soft moans coming from the kitchen, Harry realized that Sirius apparently hadn't kept his eye on the time, and had also forgotten to ward the house. Harry therefore headed down the corridor in the opposite direction of the kitchen.

A short time later, Sirius groaned as Faith climbed off him. "I should never have let you install granite worktops."

Faith grinned at her husband who was lying on his back. "You could have transfigured them into something more comfortable."

"You barely gave me time to catch my breath, let alone cast a spell." A muffled bang caught Sirius' attention. "What time is it?"

Faith looked at her wristwatch. "Just gone seven."

"Damn. Harry's supposed to be meeting me at seven; that must be him." Sirius hooked an arm around his wife's waist, and apparated them both upstairs to the shower.

Faith switched on the shower using the magical switch Sirius had had installed for her, and grabbed Sirius' arm before he could head back into the bedroom. "Do you think he'd mind waiting?"

Sirius hesitated before letting Faith tug him into the shower. "I really shouldn't be doing this."

"You're supposed to be keeping me happy." Faith ran her hand down Sirius' stomach. "So make me happy."

Aware his godson wouldn't mind waiting, Sirius placed both hands on his wife's waist to stop her slipping as she nuzzled his neck. "Is it pregnancy or are you always this insatiable?"

"I'm always this insatiable." Faith nibbled at Sirius' shoulder before starting to kiss her way down his chest, her words broken between the kisses. "And if I'm not, then you only have yourself to blame. I'm not the one who forgot the contraceptive spell yet again."

"You shouldn't be so..." Sirius arched forward as his wife's mouth enveloped him. "Oh Merlin."

Twenty minutes later Sirius found himself lying on his back yet again; this time on hard tile. "This is beginning to become a habit I'm not sure I'm too fond of."

Faith kissed him before getting to her feet. "You know you're lying."

"I might be." Sirius grinned, as he got up and started showering, Faith grabbing the soap from him and washing his back.

Sliding her hand around his waist, Faith was stopped from going further by Sirius' hand grasping her wrist. "No?"

Sirius turned to face his wife. "I can only keep Harry waiting so long, and as much as I'd like to say yes, I'm going to have to say no."

Half an hour after saying no, Sirius walked into the hallway to find it empty. "Harry?" He wasn't surprised that he didn't get an answer; Harry had obviously got fed up with waiting. Deciding he'd better check to see if he'd gone home to Potter Place, Sirius apparated out and found H.J. and Hermione alone. "Has Harry been by?"

"Which one?" H.J. had patched things up with his brother after Cassandra had been taken, and Harry had been spending a lot of time with him since then.

"My godson." Sirius identified the Harry he'd meant. "I was supposed to be meeting him at seven at my place but I was in the kitchen with Faith and we were a little distracted when Harry apparated in. I therefore didn't get to see him as he must have gotten bored and left."

It didn't take a scientist to figure out what Sirius had been doing, and H.J. had to refrain from smirking, knowing his boss wouldn't appreciate the mockery. "How did you know it was Harry who apparated in?"

"He knocked something over." Sirius hadn't stopped to look to see to what his godson had broken.

"So what did he knock over this time?" Hermione queried, as among other things, Harry Potter had inherited Tonks' clumsiness after the ritual to replace Lily as his mother.

"I haven't looked to be truthful." Sirius owned up to his failure to check things out. "I doubt it's anything important." He glanced at his watch, and made a suggestion. "Faith and I are about to have dinner, so if you haven't eaten, do you want to join us? We can catch up on things since we haven't really had time to get together lately."

"We'd like that." Hermione spoke up for both of them as they'd both been discussing what to eat just before Sirius had apparated in. "And we can see what fumble fingers broke while we wait for dinner to be ready." Hermione had organized the replacement of several dinner sets due to both Harry Potter and Tonks smashing quite a lot of the settings beyond repair.

When they arrived back at Sirius' home the three of them headed into the sitting room. Sirius looked around. "I can't see anything out of place."

"Let's try your study." H.J. suggested, aware that that was where they usually met.

After a look in the study yielded nothing, curious to see what Harry had broken, the group headed into the dining room, and then checked each room along the corridor until they finally reached the tapestry room.

Walking into the room Sirius glanced over at the far wall where all of his ancestral paintings were hanging, a space indicating one was missing. "Why would Harry remove a painting?"

Hermione picked up a small painting that was lying on the floor by the table in the center of the room. "This explains the noise you heard. Harry must have dropped it."

Sirius took it from her. "That's Grandy Melina. I don't see why Harry would even want to look at a picture of her, let alone drop it."

The painting responded. "Are you talking about the dark-haired man who was in here?"

"Yes." Sirius held the painting out in front of him. "Did he say anything?"

Melina confirmed that he had. "First of all he muttered something about you not being able to keep it in..."

Sirius cut her off. "I get it. Did he say anything important?"

"It depends on what you consider important." Melina knew she'd embarrassed her great-grandson. "He was fine until he saw me. He lifted me off the wall and carried my portrait over to the table."

"Why would he do that?" Hermione asked her.

In the painting, the woman shrugged. "I'm presuming that he wanted to get a better look as he held me under the lamp. Something must have caught his eye because he then took a step back, said 'Merlin, no.' and dropped me."

Sirius moved to the side of the table Hermione had picked the picture up from and held it under the lamplight before lifting his eyes. As his godson had, he took a step backward, the picture once again falling to the floor. "Merlin, no."

Melina made a furious demand as she was dropped yet again. "Will someone please tell me what all the 'Merlin, no' is about?"

Ignoring her, Hermione and H.J. both swung their gazes to where Sirius was looking. Hermione didn't repeat Sirius' words but she did gasp. "But Harry said..."

H.J.'s face was grim as he noticed what his wife and Sirius had seen. "He was wrong."

Castrum House

Harry Potter opened the door to his bedroom, his face set in stone as he met Cassandra's eyes. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Cassandra was a little confused. "Tell you what?"

"The reason why you wanted the portrait." Harry stood over the bed.

"Where is it?" Cassandra could see it wasn't in Harry's hands.

"I left it there." Harry headed back out of the bedroom, and poured himself a glass of brandy. "You could have warned me."

Cassandra moved to stand behind him. "I'm sorry, Harry. But I didn't want to say anything until I'd made sure."

"Well you can say you're definitely sure now." Harry put down the glass and picked up his cloak and mask. "Don't forget. Don't leave these rooms. I'll be back tomorrow."

Cassandra could do little to stop him as he vanished, and she was left alone with her thoughts for company.

6th November 2011

Mione stretched, having finally just said goodnight to the last of the guests who'd attended the slightly belated Bonfire Night party Thomas had hosted. Deciding she was still too awake to go to bed, she headed outside to the conservatory, a bottle of the beer Thomas favored in her hand.

"I thought you'd gone to bed." Thomas had a bottle of the beer himself.

"I'm a little on edge. I love my daughter dearly but Mads nearly drove me mad this evening with her endless begging to stay up late." Mione wasn't exactly surprised when Thomas put down his beer to wrap his arms around her waist, as since she'd agreed to his request months

earlier, he now took every opportunity to hold her. "If you hadn't put your foot down, I don't think she'd have ever gone to bed."

"It's hard to believe that she's eight, isn't it?" Thomas could still remember his daughter as a tiny, defenseless baby as if it was yesterday.

"She's certainly growing up fast." Mione shivered as Thomas dropped a kiss on her neck. "Perhaps I'd better go to bed."

"Not yet." Thomas protested as he continued to softly kiss Mione's neck.

"Someone might come out." Mione tried to pull away.

"I'm sure neither Harry nor Regulus would be surprised to see us like this." Thomas moved so that he was facing his wife. "Mione, I know I said I'd wait for you to come to me, but it's been eighteen months now."

"You said you wouldn't push this." Mione's voice was shaking.

"I know what I said." Thomas trailed his fingers down his wife's neck and across her breast, her nipple hardening at the fleeting touch. "But I want you."

Mione stifled the whimper that threatened to surface as Thomas' fingers drifted even lower. "I... I can't."

"Yes, you can." Thomas could feel her trembling, and he knew from her face it wasn't because she was afraid of him. "But I'm not going to force to you. So if you tell me you don't want this, then I'll stop."

"Thomas, I..." Mione stopped speaking as Thomas' hands moved to hold her against him, and she could feel how much he wanted her. And even though she'd tried again and again to deny it, she couldn't hide the truth from herself; she wanted him just as much.

Thomas had felt his wife start as she'd come into close contact with his body, and as she steadied herself by placing her hands on his chest and whimpered in her throat, Thomas bent his head and whispered softly in her ear. "Can I make love to you, Mione?"

About to say no, the word died on her lips when Thomas brushed his mouth over the sensitive skin below her ear sending long denied sensations coursing through her body. So instead Mione said nothing and wrapped her arms around his neck. At Mione's silent acceptance, Thomas apparated them both to his bedroom before bending his head to crush her lips under his.

As Thomas ran his tongue over Mione's bottom lip, she immediately opened her mouth to allow him access. Wanting to be closer to her, Thomas cupped her bottom, pulling her forcefully against him. Then, irritated by the barrier that separated her from him, as Mione unbuttoned his shirt, Thomas moved his hand to where the top of Mione's dress grazed her breasts, before grasping it and tearing it from her body, before doing the same to her panties. Thomas then molded his hand to Mione's breast, her already hardened nipple brushing against his palm, and he felt himself grow harder as his need for her seemed to explode.

Frantic kiss followed frantic kiss with Mione running her hands over Thomas' chest before shifting them to the waistband of his trousers in an effort to pull them off. Not giving Mione a chance to finish her task, Thomas pushed her hands aside and lowered her to the floor. Still partially dressed, Thomas couldn't wait any longer, and forgoing both the removal of his clothing and the usual foreplay, he instead slid immediately into Mione's welcoming heat.

It had been too long for both of them; there was no tenderness as they both began to move simultaneously, coming together with a force born of desperation and need. And it soon became obvious that their lovemaking was going to be of short duration. Mione had barely buried her fingers in Thomas' hair, her tongue assaulting his mouth, when her body began to tingle and shake. Trying to force him deeper into her, Mione wrapped her legs around his back as her shaking became more violent and she cried out. When Mione started to contract around him, Thomas could feel his own body tightening in

response as heat pooled in the pit of his stomach, and he groaned loudly as waves of pleasure rippled over him.

At first, neither of them moved and simply lay panting on the floor. Thomas then apparated them both to his bed, doing it so precisely that Mione barely noticed the transition.

Lying over her, Thomas looked down into Mione's face. "I love you so much, Mione, and I've hated every moment I've had to sleep alone."

"So have I." Mione ignored the tiny voice inside of her that screamed 'traitor'. "But it's been so hard for me to have to come to terms with who you are; what you've done; what you're going to do."

"And have you come to terms with it now?" Thomas found his heart was beating faster as he waited for Mione's response.

"I don't know." Mione wasn't yet ready to make that kind of decision, but she acknowledged that she had taken a step in that direction. "However, I do know that I want to be your wife again in every sense of the word, even knowing who you are." Again Mione ignored the inner voice of guilt that screamed the same word over and over again in her mind.

Unaware of his wife's internal battle, Thomas didn't think he'd ever felt so happy. "When you didn't know who I was, you have no idea how much I wanted to share everything with you. Time and time again I came close to telling you the truth but I was afraid to lose you."

"If I'd run away, you'd have just dragged me back like you did before." Mione pointed out.

"I only did it because I couldn't live without you." Thomas kissed Mione gently, deepening the kiss as she responded to him. When it ended, he looked down at her with a tenderness Mione had never seen before, and he literally bared his soul to his wife. "Without you I'm nothing, Mione. I thought my world had come to an end that night you found out who I was, and I saw how distressed you were. And

then when the portkey operated, I was so terribly afraid I'd never see you again."

"I thought the same." Mione whispered. "But I'll never leave you again."

At Mione's words, a desperate need to become one with his wife filled Thomas, and he covered Mione's mouth with his own, his hands beginning a familiar journey over her body once more.

8th November 2011

Watcher's Council - 8.15a.m.

Remus could smell the guilt and regret on Mione the moment he walked into her office. Not stopping to close the door, he perched on the edge of her desk. "You slept with him last night, didn't you?"

Mione promptly burst into tears. "I'm sorry."

Remus slipped off the desk. "Mione, it's not the end of the world."

"Then why does it feel like it is?" Mione looked up at Remus. "After you went to bed, I gave into my feelings, and slept with him willingly, Remus." She bit her lip. "It's already hard enough for me without my being so stupid as to bring sex into the equation."

"Mione, we both know you're still in love with him." Remus' heart contracted as he said the words. "It was only a matter of time before you turned to him again."

"But I shouldn't have done it." Mione was wracked with guilt; for sleeping with Thomas; for wanting to wipe away the memory of doing so; for betraying her friends; and because she knew that she was going to do it again. "I only went back to him to stop him from hurting you and the others; this wasn't meant to happen. I'm not supposed to feel like this about him."

Remus took Mione's hand in his. "Maybe not, but it's a good thing you went back. If you hadn't returned to him, Cassandra would be dead; instead because you pleaded with him, she's alive and relatively safe."

"But he won't let me do that every time; he's already warned me more than once that his actions as Dominus are separate from the life we have together." Mione stood up, and leant against Remus. "And I'm not sure how I'm going to cope when I'm faced with a situation I can't deal with, especially given what I've just done."

"Tell him how you feel about it." Remus suggested as he wrapped his arms around Mione to comfort her. "I'm sure he'll listen."

"If you think that then you don't know him. I've tried to change him, but to no avail. I wish he'd give it all up but he won't; not even for me." Mione relaxed as she listened to the steady and comforting beat of Remus' heart under her ear.

"I think Thomas is going to be more than a little acquiescent now that you're willing to sleep with him again." Remus pointed out.

Mione's guilt reasserted itself. "I didn't intend for it to happen. But I'd missed him, Remus, and he was so like he was in the beginning when I didn't know he was Dominus. I know it was wrong, but I couldn't say no when he asked." Mione closed her eyes. "And even though I know I shouldn't, I love him more than I can say, I really do." She started to cry softly again. "Remus, this is killing me."

Remus could feel Mione's swirling emotions, and his heart sank. "You want to stop spying on him, don't you?"

"I don't know." Mione had never felt so torn in her life. "But I don't think that I can hide my guilt at what I'm doing forever from him, just as I can't hide my emotions from you."

Not wanting her to make a mistake, Remus urged her to examine her feelings. "Mione, before you make a decision, are you sure that making love hasn't influenced you?"

"I'd be lying if I said that it hadn't." Mione thought about how she'd felt the previous night. "Remus, when we made love I felt alive again; something I haven't felt in a long time. And now I don't know what to do."

Remus held her more tightly. "Mione, no matter what you decide, my feelings for you will..."

A small sound alerted him to the fact that someone had drawn in a sharp breath. Even though Remus had heard footsteps coming along the corridor he'd ignored them in favor of concentrating on Mione's distress. He'd also ignored the familiar scent that had filled his nostrils, barely registering it, but suddenly when combined with the noise, his brain screamed out exactly who was standing behind him. Remus spun around to find Thomas standing in the open doorway, a large bouquet of white roses in his hand. "Thomas."

"Perhaps you'd like to finish your sentence, Lupin." Thomas closed the door behind him as he walked in.

Mione stepped from around the desk. "What are you doing here? I thought you were in Paris."

"After last night, I came to bring you these." Thomas dropped the flowers to the floor, his face a cold mask. "But I see I've wasted my time. Why did you even bother sleeping with me, Mione, when you're clearly fucking him?"

Mione took a step backwards as Thomas withdrew his wands. "After last night, you can't really believe that I'd cheat on you."

"Actually I can." Thomas disarmed Remus who, while managing to withdraw his own wand, didn't stand a chance. "For a werewolf you're extraordinarily slow."

Remus placed himself in front of Mione. "Dueling isn't exactly my forte."

"It's mine." Thomas responded. "Perhaps we should fight over my wife."

"I'm not a possession to be fought over." Mione tried to step around Remus, only for him to reposition himself in front of her.

"How gallant." Thomas' voice dripped with sarcasm. "Your lover is defending you."

"Remus is not my lover." Mione ground out.

"Confringo." Thomas blasted Remus sideways with an overpowered spell.

Mione watched in horror as Remus hit the corner of a filing cabinet, before sliding unconscious to the floor, his head bleeding profusely. Kneeling down, she put a hand to his head.

On seeing his wife's concern for Remus, Thomas lost it, and he lifted her up from the floor by her throat, before slamming her up against the window. "You faithless whore."

"Let go." Mione managed to croak out.

Thomas ignored the entreaty as he continued to tighten the stranglehold he had. "Strange how our world and this one parallel themselves isn't it, Mione? Cammie once compared me to Amicus, and I find it almost unbelievable that like him, I've been cuckolded by the woman I love with the same man he was."

A knock sounded at the door and it opened. "Mrs. Sev... Oh my God."

Thomas didn't even bother to look around, and after removing one of his hands from Mione's throat, his wand flew into his grasp, and he aimed it behind him. "Avada Kedavra."

Unable to get the word 'no' out, Mione scrabbled frantically at Thomas' remaining hand, trying to shift it as dark spots played in front of her eyes.

"I think it's time we left." Thomas backhanded Mione, splitting her lip, before she crashed to the ground and hit her head.

The last thing Mione saw before she passed out was Thomas bending over Remus.

Castrum House: 10am

Mione covered her ears as she tried to block out Remus' screams of pain. Suddenly everything went quiet, and a few moments later the door to her cell opened and a body was flung in. Scrambling across the floor in the dark that reasserted itself the moment the door was closed, Mione felt around until she touched warm but wet skin. "Remus?"

Remus groaned. "Hurts."

Mione reached out, making Remus scream as she irritated one of the open wounds on his body. "Oh Merlin, what have they done to you?"

Continuing to carefully feel her way along his chest, once she found his head, Mione shifted her position so that it was now resting on her lap. She gently began to stroke his hair. "I'm so sorry, Remus. I should have listened to you."

"S'okay." Remus' throat hurt to talk from all the screaming he'd done, but he still wanted to comfort Mione. "Not that bad."

Mione gave a tiny frightened sob. "I heard you, Remus. And I know what they're capable of."

Remus had never felt so much pain, not even during one of his earlier transformations, and now he was beyond exhausted. "Tired. So tired."

"Go to sleep then." Mione continued to stroke his hair.

Pain and exhaustion taking its toll, Remus stopped fighting the inevitable, and gave into sleep.

As Remus joined Morpheus, Harry Potter made his way upstairs to his rooms and dropped onto the sofa. Cassandra couldn't see his face but she instinctively knew that something was dreadfully wrong. "Are you alright?"

"Not really." Harry pulled off his mask, his face strained and pale. "Thomas caught Mione and Uncle Remus together this morning."

"Are they alright?" Cassandra knew only too well from her husband what Thomas had done to his previous lover when he'd caught her cheating on him.

"Not exactly." Harry ran a hand over his face. "He's going to execute them on the night of the full moon."

"Isn't there anything you can do to help them?" Even though it was early in the morning, Cassandra got up and poured out a brandy for Harry.

"No." Harry took the glass gratefully. "If anything, I'm going to make things worse for them."

"What do you mean?" In shock herself, Cassandra didn't catch onto Harry's meaning.

"Cassandra, Harry and Uncle Sirius didn't tell you but I'm a werewolf as well." Harry revealed. "I forced Harry into turning me."

"Actually, Harry did tell me." Cassandra had been the one who'd comforted her husband the next day. She suddenly made the connection between Harry and his comment. "Are you trying to tell me that it's going to be you who's going to have to kill them?"

"Only if Remus doesn't do what Thomas wants." Harry had been told by Regulus what Thomas intended to do to the couple. "But I'm not entirely innocent in what's happening to them right now."

This time Cassandra understood straightaway what Harry was trying to tell her. "You've been torturing them, haven't you?"

"Just Uncle Remus." Harry had had little choice but to do as Thomas had ordered. However, he'd done it with a heavy heart.

Cassandra could see that he was trying not to cry. "So there's nothing you can do, is there?"

"Not a damn thing." Harry then dealt another blow. "Because of what's happened, Thomas has instigated a lockdown, and while the Inner Circle and myself can move freely, I can't risk going to Uncle Sirius to let him know that Uncle Remus and Mione are here. I've got the feeling that Thomas is testing me yet again, and if anyone tries to rescue them, it's going to fall on my doorstep."

"Then we're just going to have to hope that Dad and Harry figure out what's happened." Even as she said it, Cassandra wasn't sure if she wanted her husband risking his life to mount a rescue, but she knew that that was exactly what he'd do if he learned the whereabouts of the couple.

"I'm hoping for the same." Harry put down the brandy and dropped his head into hands. "Just as I can only hope Uncle Remus will forgive me for what I did to him."

"I'm sure he will." Cassandra put an arm around his back.

As Harry drew comfort from his friend, neither of them added 'if he survives long enough'.

Watchers' Council – 10.30am

Harry Sebastian finished examining the body. "It looks like the killing curse. But the pathologist will have to confirm that."

Sirius walked over to the filing cabinet, and examined the edge of it. "Someone hit this."

Harry sniffed the air. "I'd say this is Remus' blood."

A little unnerved, Sirius pulled a face. "You know what Remus' blood smells like?"

"No." Harry informed him. "But I know what the scent from Mione's blood smells like, and this doesn't smell anything like it."

"I don't think I even want to ask." Sirius knelt down in front of the large pool of red liquid that sat close to the cabinet.

"I've cut her before when we've dueled." Harry also bent down to examine the pool with Sirius. "This is the same blood as that on the cabinet." He stood back up and judged the height of the piece of furniture. "I'd estimate this is almost six feet in height, so I'm guessing that Remus hit his head on it."

"What makes you say that?" Sirius was always interested in how Harry worked, often using Muggle and magical techniques to make his deductions.

This time Harry was using purely Muggle logic to reach a hypothesis. "Remus is six feet four, and I can't think of any other body part that he could have hit except for his head as there's blood on top of the cabinet. After hitting his head on the edge of the cabinet, I'm guessing that he was probably knocked unconscious and landed on the floor, where he left the pool of blood before being portkeyed out."

Sirius made an observation. "You can't know that for sure. Remus could have been cut somewhere else, such as his arm, touched the cabinet and bled onto the floor. And what makes you think he was portkeyed?"

Harry broke down his reasoning. "If Remus had been at home, I might have agreed with you about it being somewhere other than his head but when he's in work, I know he usually wears a suit, and quite a heavyweight one at that. Therefore the material would have soaked up a lot of the blood if his body had sustained damage, and there'd also be smeared blood on the top of the cabinet if he'd touched it, and not the explosive splattering there is. Ergo, as Remus is taller than the cabinet, he was obviously not standing upright when he hit it, so unless he fainted and hit it, which I seriously doubt, he was knocked off his feet by a spell or a fist, and hit the cabinet with some

force. He was obviously portkeyed, or apparated, because there would have been a trail of blood if he'd been dragged off."

Even though he'd deliberately queried Harry's assumption, Sirius had already drawn the same conclusion. "I concur. I think I just like to hear you talk it through."

"Join one of my classes." Harry quipped. "You'd get quite a kick from listening to some of the trainees trying to work this sort of thing out."

"I might just do that." Sirius warned. "I haven't evaluated you in some time."

Harry was aware that Sirius wasn't joking. "Surprise me."

"You know that that's exactly what I'll do." Sirius picked up Mione's jacket that was still hanging on the back of her chair. "She apparently didn't leave of her own free will. Like Remus, whenever I've seen her around the office, she wears a full suit."

"Unless she left in a hurry." Harry sniffed the air again and, after trying to ignore the smell of Remus' blood, he lifted the curtain. "There's a small splatter on these. And this is Mione's blood."

Sirius examined the tiny stain. "There's not much, so she's obviously sustained a much smaller injury." Like Harry had with cabinet, he judged the height of the bloodstain. "I'd say that this correlates to Mione's head, so perhaps she sustained some sort of facial injury which sent blood flying over the curtains."

By now Harry had found several more small stains to corroborate Sirius' own hypothesis. "I'd agree."

"So now the question is, who did this?" Sirius asked.

Harry was at a loss. "Normally I'd go with Thomas."

"He could have discovered what she's done." Sirius suggested.

Harry disagreed. "You're forgetting that I saw both of them this morning at breakfast. Thomas left just before I did."

"And he didn't seem upset?" Sirius was scanning the desk, but nothing on it gave him any indication as to what might have happened.

"Quite the contrary." Harry's mouth tightened slightly. "Thomas was amazingly attentive and loving towards Mione, which to be honest was hardly surprising."

"Why?" Sirius glanced up from his examination, frowning when he saw the somewhat disapproving look on Harry's face.

"Because they'd just made love before they got up." Harry hadn't been able to miss the telltale signs.

"I don't need you to explain how you know this time." Sirius ran a hand over his chin. "I think we'd better contact Thomas and Nicole and let them know what's happened. I'll take Nicole."

Harry glanced up as he heard footsteps. "I think this might be our pathologist now."

It was, and Harry and Sirius both filled him in on what they believed before walking out of the room. "I'll let you know if I find anything useful out."

"I'll see you later." Sirius checked the corridor was clear before vanishing.

Aware that Thomas had a meeting in Paris, Harry withdrew a pen from his pocket and tapped it with his wand. "Portus." After tapping his Auror badge so that it now resembled a Muggle Interpol badge and transfiguring his clothes, Harry operated the portkey, his Auror's status allowing him to bypass Customs and Immigration and portkey directly to Paris central.

When he reappeared not far from the Louvre, Harry headed towards the corporate building he knew that Thomas' meeting was being held

in, Thomas having mentioned it the previous night. Once inside, he cleared security and headed up to the relevant floor.

Stepping into the reception area of the offices, Harry smiled at the girl who was manning the desk and spoke to her in fluent French, having learnt several languages as part of his training as an Unspeakable. "My name is Harry Sebastian." He showed her his Interpol badge. "And I believe that you have a Thomas Seville attending a meeting here. I need to speak to him."

"I'm afraid that the meeting cannot be interrupted, Inspector Sebastian." The girl had been given strict instructions, and being new, she was sticking to them.

"Unless you wish to be arrested for obstruction, I suggest you do exactly that." Harry suggested, his smile remaining steady.

Flustered, the girl picked up the telephone and rattled off a message. Harry waited, and a tall woman came out. "Please come this way, Inspector."

After a few minutes, Thomas marched into the anteroom that Harry had been shown into. "Harry, I wondered if it was you."

Harry didn't bother with any pleasantries and got straight to the point. "Mione's gone missing, Thomas."

"Missing?" Thomas frowned. "My ring hasn't gone off at all."

Harry couldn't believe he'd forgotten about Thomas' ring. "Not even a faint vibration?"

"No, why?" Thomas asked.

Harry explained about the dead secretary, and his findings. "I found small traces of Mione's blood on the curtains in her office, so given that she didn't activate her Ministry portkey and your ring didn't alert you to a problem, then she either wasn't expecting to be hit or she knew her attacker and wasn't afraid." Harry deduced.

"You don't think..." Thomas began.

Harry assumed Thomas' question and answered it before he could finish his sentence. "No, I don't think you're involved. Remus Lupin is also missing, so we believe it might be someone with a grudge against the Council. However, unlike Mione, Remus appears to have sustained a fairly major injury as his blood was all over the floor."

Thomas sat down. "So you have no idea where my wife is?"

Harry had to admit that he didn't. "None at all but we're going to do everything we can to find her."

"I'll get my own men onto it." Thomas got to his feet. "If you'll excuse me, I'm going to inform those in the meeting what has happened, and then leave."

"Will you be at Grimmauld Square?" Harry checked on Thomas' intended destination, before opening the door.

"I'm not sure." Thomas followed Harry out. "But I'll contact you or Sirius if I find out anything you need to know."

Harry left, and Thomas returned to his meeting. "I'm sorry about that, gentlemen. A small personal crisis."

"Do you want to reschedule?" The head of the company Thomas was thinking about buying, asked.

"Not at all." Thomas sat back down. "My men have it under control."

Castrum House – 4pm

Remus had a feeling he was going to be put through hell again as the door to the cell opened to reveal a very familiar gold masked man. "Bring him."

"No." Mione screamed as she was pulled away from Remus. "You'll kill him."

Thomas stepped into the cell. "Don't worry too much about him. He's going to be surviving for a little bit longer. However, I can't guarantee he's going to have a pleasant time while he does, but I want him alive."

Knowing she wasn't going to like the answer, Mione's voice came out in little more than a whisper. "Why?"

"Because it's a full moon soon." Thomas responded to his wife's question. "And I thought it fitting you both die on the same day."

"No." Mione screamed out. "He didn't do anything wrong."

His men having dragged Remus out, Thomas stepped out of the cell, ignoring Mione's statement. "Chain him in the middle of the room."

"Please don't hurt him." Mione couldn't stop the tears that were falling down her cheeks. "It's me you're angry with."

"No, Mione, it's not. It's both of you." Thomas snarled. "But you needn't worry about feeling left out, I'm not about to forget about you."

Screaming out his name, Mione threw herself at the cell door as it closed, collapsing onto the ground when Thomas didn't come back. "But he didn't do anything wrong."

Next Chapter: Thomas reveals his true nature to his wife; Harry Sebastian struggles to find an answer; Hogwarts falls.

Chapter 72: When Love Dies

9th November 2011

Castrum House

As the door to the cell opened and Remus was thrown back in, Mione started to crawl towards him. "Remus, are you still conscious?"

He was. "It wasn't so bad this time." Remus managed to pull himself up against the wall. "My tormentor today wasn't anywhere near as powerful or imaginative as Thomas."

Mione finally came across Remus in the dark and grabbed his arm. "Why are they torturing just you?"

Remus had news for her. "My charming host told me that Thomas is going to be dealing with you tomorrow."

"He's leaving it a little late isn't he?" Mione's stomach lurched despite her glib tone.

Remus could easily sense her fear, and unable to bear the thought of Mione going through what he just had, he made a decision. "Mione, I know I'll be dragged out again later. When I am, I'm going to tell Thomas the truth; that you were just seeking reassurance from me about your marriage."

Mione slid her hand down Remus' arm until she found his hand. "Then you'd have to tell him why I felt it was necessary to do so, and he'd kill me for that anyway."

"There must be some way to stop him from hurting you." Remus didn't know how he was going to be able to bear just sitting in the cell and listening while Mione screamed out in pain as he had done that morning.

"Even if we found a way, it wouldn't end there, Remus. Once he found out exactly what had happened, he'd go after the others."

Mione was resolute. "And I don't want anyone else to die because of me."

"And I don't want you to die for something you haven't done." Remus wished Mione would see reason.

"The answer is still no, Remus." Mione then alluded to her unusual status. "Anyway, I'm not even sure whether or not I can die."

Although he'd already assumed what was going to happen because of what Thomas had told Mione about the full moon, Remus had only been told that morning by his tormentor exactly what he was expected to do. "According to Rupert, Thomas seems to think you can, and I don't want to hurt you."

"It won't be you." Like Remus, Mione had already guessed what her husband had planned for her, and even though she was absolutely terrified, she didn't want Remus blaming himself.

"You don't understand." Remus tried not to cry as he told her. "He's going to give me Wolfsbane."

Tired and upset, Mione wasn't thinking as clearly as she'd usually be. "You're right. I don't understand."

"He wants me to know what I'm doing." Remus' voice hitched as he struggled to contain his emotions. "He wants me to be aware that it's you I'm going to be slaughtering."

"What will he do to you, if you don't do it?" Mione quite rightly assumed that Remus had initially refused.

"Silver nitrate." Remus had seen H.J.'s memories of what had happened to the other Remus, as well as Nicole's brief viewing of Thomas' own memory. "He's offered me the killing curse if I do as I'm told. And if I don't, before he kills me, he's going to make me watch as he hands you over to a werewolf who would do the job for me."

"He'd really do that to me?" Mione asked, her mind trying to assimilate what Remus had told her.

"You already know the answer to that." Remus held her closer as Mione gave a dry sob in response. "I don't want to do it, Mione, but I'm afraid of how bad it might get for you if I don't."

"Then can you make it quick?" Mione found herself being pulled onto Remus' lap, as he sought comfort both from and for her.

"Yes." Remus hoped he was telling the truth, otherwise nothing short of ripping Mione apart would achieve what Thomas wanted from him. He therefore couldn't stop his own tears as he rocked Mione while she sobbed.

10th November 2011 - Day of the Full Moon

Hogwarts - 7am

James kissed his wife long and lovingly. "You are going to be the death of me."

Tonks merely smirked as she sat upright, her hair falling over her bare breasts. "So you don't ever want me to wake you like that again?"

"I'd be a fool to say no." James lay looking up at Tonks. "But I doubt I'm going to have the energy to move today, let alone teach a class."

"I'll have you know that I did all the work, Potter." Tonks remarked in a snotty voice.

James grabbed her by the waist and rolled her off him. "Not last night you didn't, madam."

"I didn't force you." Tonks lay back on the bed as James got up.

"Nymy, when a beautiful woman climbs into the shower with me and starts letting her hands roam, there's only going to be one outcome." James walked to the closet and started picking out his clothes for the day.

"As long as the beautiful woman you're talking about is me, then that's just a perfect end to a wonderful day." Tonks yawned.

"Don't you have to be at school earlier today?" James reminded her as she went to pull the covers back over her head.

"Sadly yes. I don't know what possessed me to say I'd offer to cover the nursery opening until Julie gets in, when I could have stayed in bed a little longer with my husband." Tonks climbed out of the bed, a lascivious grin on her face. "But I still have time for a quick shower."

James slapped her bottom as she wiggled it as he followed her into the bathroom. "Is that what you're calling it?"

"Well, I could talk dirty if you'd prefer." Tonks started the shower. "And call it a..."

James shut his wife up by kissing her.

Forty minutes later Tonks grumbled as she picked up her bag, and James helped to settle their grumpy son into the Muggle style baby carrier on Tonks' back that she favored to transport him. "I'm going to be late."

"You should have thought about that earlier." James grinned. "But I for one am glad you didn't."

"For someone who was complaining that they didn't have any energy earlier, you certainly look chipper now." Tonks winced as little James tugged her hair and babbled to his mother.

"It's surprising what a shower will do for you." James grabbed Tonks by the waist, and dropped a quick kiss on her lips, before kissing his son as well. "I'm afraid that this Headmaster has a breakfast he needs to attend."

"Lucky him." Tonks' stomach grumbled at the mention of breakfast. "Some of us will have to go without."

"Little James' things are in his bag, but I also have something for you." James let go of Tonks, reached out to his bedside table, and handed her a large brown bag. "With my compliments."

Tonks looked inside the bag to find a bacon sandwich, a banana, a Muggle container of orange juice, and a Muggle travel mug that she suspected had coffee in it. "When did you do this?"

"When you were spending forever trying to decide whether to look like a cool teacher or a smart one." James told her. "Now I suggest you take your breakfast and our son, and hit the floo, otherwise you really are going to be late."

"We'll see you tonight." Tonks hurried into James' office, stepped into the fireplace, and threw floo powder down. "Potter Place." From there, Tonks would apparate out to the school.

James caught the dying green flames as he headed into the office. He'd closed the main fireplace that existed outside of the Great Hall with the arrest of Lily, and had refused to open it again. Now the only way in and out of Hogwarts was via the main gate, or if James gave access, via his personal fireplace. He'd just reached the exit to his office when he spotted Severus coming up the corridor from the library. "Good morning, Severus."

"Headmaster." Severus responded politely, the two men now having a much more personable relationship. "Did you sleep well?"

James' lips quirked slightly. "Well enough. You?"

"I spent most of last night working on a potion." Severus knew that James would know what potion. "It's coming along quite nicely."

"I'm glad to hear it." James entered the Great Hall and made his way to the table, greeting several students by name as he did so. "If you'd care to meet me in my office after dinner tonight, we can talk about it then."

"Of course." Severus inclined his head slightly and headed for his usual seat.

Castrum House – 8am

In the cold cell Remus was already awake, Mione's head pillowed on his shoulder. Even though he hadn't been able to sleep, he wasn't surprised that Mione had eventually drifted off.

As he shifted position, she woke up. "Remus?"

"How are you feeling?" Remus sat up.

"Sore." Mione admitted. "This floor doesn't exactly do anything for a person's back. Mine's killing me."

"Yours is not alone." As well as a sore back, Remus ached in places he hadn't even known existed.

"I need the bathroom." Mione got to her feet and tried to feel her way along the wall. "Of all the things I didn't expect to find in a dungeon, it was a bathroom."

"If you can call it that. I'll lead you." Being able to see better in the dark, Remus took Mione's hand and let her to the small rudimentary area at the back of the cell that passed for a bathroom. "The opening is just in front of you."

After Mione had done what she needed to, and after washing in the water that was running down the side of the wall into the channel that carried everything away, Remus did the same.

Sitting back down on the floor, Remus lifted his arm so that Mione could curl up against him. "Now if they only had room service as well, I'd be quite comfortable."

Rather than laughing as he'd hoped, Mione began to cry. "I'm scared."

"I know." Remus kissed her head.

"Remus, hold me." Mione couldn't stop shaking.

Remus lifted Mione up from the floor and placed her on his lap. "I should have done this before. You're freezing."

"You're not. You feel really nice and warm." Mione shivered against him as she tried to absorb his body heat.

Remus began to briskly rub her arms. "Is that better?"

"A little." Mione remained snuggled up against him when he stopped, and she brought up something that had been playing on her mind. "Remus, both Thomas and Harry said that this world seems to parallel our own. Given what's happened to us, I think they're right."

Remus wasn't surprised that Mione's thoughts were on what was happening to them. "Explain."

"Thomas compared me to Lily." Mione picked the most obvious comparison. "She cheated on Amicus with my world's Remus, just as Thomas believes I've cheated on him with you. Neither of them took the news well, and just as Remus was forced to murder Lily, or so Amicus thought anyway, Thomas is going to force you to do the same to me."

"You haven't cheated on Thomas." Remus pointed out the flaw in Mione's argument. "And Lily did cheat on Amicus."

"But I'm still being punished for it, just as Lily was." Mione countered. "And then there's the Inner Circle. I know Sirius doesn't believe Regulus is involved but I think he's Amicus, and not Rupert."

Remus had tried to tell Sirius time and time again that he believed that Amicus was Regulus, despite the fact that Mione hadn't been able to discover anything concrete to prove he was, but his friend had refused to listen. "I think exactly the same. It's too much of a coincidence that Regulus is Thomas' best friend here, while Sirius was his best friend there."

"And I'm sorry to say it but Rupert is far too weak for a man like Thomas to trust in the same manner as he did with the Amicus I

knew." Mione had turned the subject of Amicus being Rupert over and over in her mind, and every instinct led her to believe that it wasn't him.

"Don't be sorry." Remus didn't want Mione apologizing for his brother. "Rupert is a coward who took what didn't belong to him, and I no longer consider him to be my brother. Not after what he did to Bill Weasley."

Mione had her theories as to Rupert's defection. "It must have seemed as if all of his Christmases had come at once when Thomas offered him Bill Weasley's magic and body just for sharing a little information. Still, to do that to someone you'd have to be pretty tormented."

"Or insane or completely callous. Whichever choice drove him, it still doesn't make it right. And while I'm disgusted with Rupert for accepting Thomas' offer, I'm more disgusted with Thomas for making the offer in the first place." Remus returned to the parallel theorem they'd been discussing. "So I hope that as happened in your world, H.J. manages to get rid of Thomas but hopefully he'll do a better job of it this time."

"How do you know it won't be my Harry who's going to kill Thomas?" Mione still felt uneasy when discussing Thomas' death but since she'd learnt who he really was, she'd prepared herself for that possibility.

"I don't know which Harry is going to be the one, but do I believe that one of them is going to succeed in taking Thomas out." Remus couldn't let himself believe anything else. "Even if I'm not going to survive to see it."

"I'm sorry, Remus." Mione told him for the eighth time. "I should have listened to you and never gone back to him." She bit her lip. "If I'd stayed hidden away, I would never have been in a position to let him make love to me, and he would never have dropped by the office to give me flowers."

"Mione, you couldn't have known what would happen." Remus, as he had every time she'd brought it up, tried to comfort her.

Mione felt her tears start once more as she gave a bitter laugh. "Maybe not, but I was right that night I learnt who Thomas really was when I told you that I'd sold my soul for love."

"People have done far worse things in it's name." Remus thought back to his own past and how he'd dealt with his former wife.

Mione gave a tiny sob. "But it's you who now has to pay the price for my stupid, stupid weakness."

"Sh." Remus soothed her as she cried.

BritAD – 9.30am

Harry started as he realized Sirius was calling his name. "Sorry?"

Sirius turned to the heads of department. "Let's adjourn this until tomorrow morning."

As everyone left, Harry apologized. "I'm sorry, Sirius."

Sirius began to tidy up his papers. "You're worried about Mione and Remus, aren't you?"

Harry could barely focus on anything else. "I'm missing something. I just know I am."

"You know as well as I do that you've gone over this with a fine toothcomb." Sirius picked up his neat pile of papers. "And there just aren't any leads."

"I keep going back to Thomas." Harry climbed to his feet.

"Harry, you saw what he was like with Mione that morning." Sirius had seen Harry's memory. "And you said yourself that they'd just made love. And as much as I hate to say it, even though he's Dominus, he can't be held responsible for everything. So I think this

time, that our initial hunch is right, and it's someone holding a grudge against the Council. There are enough vampires and demons out there that aren't particularly fond of it."

"I know that but..." Harry shook his head in frustration. "Oh I don't know."

As he opened the door, Sirius made a suggestion. "Go back to the Council. Question everyone involved again if it helps to put your mind at rest."

Harry handed over his own papers. "I'll do that." Not giving Sirius a chance to say anything else, he vanished.

Castrum House 10a.m.

Remus gave a heavy sigh as he heard the door opening. "Couldn't he have given me a break today of all days?"

Mione reminded him of what he'd told her yesterday. "I have a feeling this house call is for me."

She was right as the silver-masked individual who had opened the cell beckoned to Mione. "Come along, Dominus wants to see you."

Remus quickly squeezed her hand, before Mione got shakily to her feet and followed the man out of the cell, noting that the guards were more or less standing to attention as she and the Death Eater passed by. She was surprised when she was led away from the dungeons and through the house until she reached the rooms she knew belonged to Thomas. "Why have you brought me here?"

"Because I was asked to." The man withdrew his wand making Mione recoil. "I'm just going to heal your face."

Mione stood still as the man did exactly as he said he would. "You're Amicus, aren't you?"

"Yes." Regulus handed over a tub of salve. "Put this on your neck."

Mione opened up the tub and sniffed it before applying it. "Why are you doing this?"

"Thomas asked me to do it." Regulus repeated his earlier response. "If you go into that room, you'll find clean clothes to put on after you've showered."

"Showered?" Mione knew she must sound stupid but she was having trouble reconciling her treatment now with how Thomas had dealt with her at the Council.

Regulus didn't bother to explain, instead pointing towards the room. "Off you go."

Mione headed into the room that Regulus had indicated, to find a bedroom very like the one Thomas had at their London home. Spotting an open doorway, she went through it.

It was almost thirty minutes later when Regulus glanced over as a freshly washed and dressed Mione came back into the sitting room. "I'll dry your hair for you."

Mione let the Death Eater use a spell to dry her hair. "Where is Thomas?"

"Right here." Thomas came through a set of double doors, holding the hand of their eldest daughter.

It became apparent to Mione in that moment why her treatment had changed. It hadn't been for her benefit, but for her daughter's. "No. You promised she wouldn't be a part of this."

"And you made promises to me that you've broken." Thomas then addressed his daughter and let go of her hand. "See, I told you that Mum was alright."

Maddie shot across the room and into her mother's arms. "Theresa said that you were missing, Mum."

"Daddy knew where I was." Mione shot Thomas a hate-filled look as she hugged her daughter. "I want her out of here."

"She's actually quite comfortable here, Mione, but given what we have to talk about I think you might actually be right." Thomas turned to Regulus. "Would you mind taking Maddie to her rooms?"

"Her rooms?" Mione echoed. "Since when does she have rooms here?"

Not realizing the gravity of the situation, and excited to show off to her mother, Maddie turned to look at her father. "Can I tell her, Daddy?"

"Go ahead." Thomas instructed his daughter.

Her face aglow, Maddie launched into a speech about her rooms. "I've got a sitting room, two bedrooms and a bathroom just for me. And Daddy let me choose all the furniture myself, and the walls are all pink and decorated with real fairies. I haven't slept in it yet, but Daddy said today that I can tonight if I want to."

Mione refrained from what she wanted to say, not wanting to upset her daughter. Instead she turned to Regulus, and even though it went against every fiber of her being to hand her daughter over to a Death Eater, she made a request of him. "I think Thomas is right, Amicus, and Maddie should go with you to her rooms."

Regulus held out his hands. "Do you want to come with me?"

"Can we play cards again?" Maddie ran over and took Regulus' hand.

"Of course we can." Regulus opened the door and led the girl out.

Only once they'd left the room did Mione turn on her husband. "She trusts Amicus?"

"Very much." Thomas confirmed. "She's known him for years."

"Who is he?" Mione was almost certain now that it was Regulus behind the mask.

"That's none of your business." Thomas face became cold now that his daughter had gone. "And right now you have more important things to worry about than Amicus and Maddie."

Mione disagreed. "There's nothing more important than my daughter. How could you bring her here, let alone introduce her to him?"

Thomas wasn't contrite about what he'd done. "Because very soon she's going to be spending a great deal more time here with me. Her training will begin when she turns nine."

Mione thought her heart was going to fail as she gleaned Thomas' intent. "You can't do that to Maddie. She's only a child."

"She's my child." Thomas circled his wife as he spoke to her. "And she's going to become my heir here as well as for the Seville Corporation."

"Please no, Thomas." Mione begged. "No matter what you think I've done..."

Reminded of the reason why his wife was here now, Thomas stared incredulously at her. "Think? There's no think about it."

"Whatever you believe, there's no way I'm going to let you poison my daughter." Mione snarled at him, her fear for daughter overriding her fear of her husband. "No decent mother would."

"Decent? You call yourself decent?" Thomas' voice was mocking. "No decent mother would be found dead fucking a werewolf but you did it. You're not fit to call yourself a mother."

"I haven't slept with Remus." Mione stood her ground as Thomas stopped circling and came to a standstill in front of her. "And I've been a good mother to all of my children."

In spite of his anger and hurt, Thomas couldn't deny Mione's claim about her mothering, so instead he returned to the subject of her infidelity. "But you've been a lousy wife."

"How dare you?" Mione's anger and fear combined in indignation. "I stood by you even after everything you've done to my friends and family."

"Stood is the right word. You stood by me but you lay down for the werewolf." Thomas twisted his fingers in Mione's hair making her scream out. "Tell me, Mione, did you scream like that for the werewolf when he fucked you?" Thomas had no idea that he'd almost mimicked Amicus' words to Lily when he'd discovered her deceit. When Mione didn't answer, Thomas yanked her hair again. "Well, did you?"

"No." Mione barked out at him as she tried to pull free of his painful grip.

"I don't believe you." Thomas tipped her head backwards so that Mione's neck was bared to him. "And I've therefore decided that you're not worthy of being my wife nor the mother of my children. You're nothing but a whore, and it's about time I treated you like one."

As Thomas began to nip at her exposed neck, Mione realized what he intended to do. "Thomas, no."

Thomas stopped what he was doing. "You think you deserve it any other way? You think I should treat you with the same respect I had for you before I found out about you and him?"

Mione couldn't stop the tears that were beginning to form. "There is nothing between Remus and me. Thomas, you have to believe me."

Thomas wanted to believe his wife but he just couldn't dismiss what he'd overheard. "I don't. You betrayed me, Mione. You, the one woman I thought that I could trust. I wanted to give you the world; to give you forever. I loved you more than life itself, Mione."

Mione's voice was barely audible. "And I loved you, Thomas."

"Then why did you do this to me?" Thomas wiped the tears from Mione's cheek with his hand, and repeated his question when she didn't respond. "Tell me, please. Why did you do it?"

"I didn't." Mione sobbed out her response.

"I found you in the half breed's arms, Mione." Thomas had caught the conversation from the point where Mione was professing how guilty she felt. "And I heard the two of you. If you weren't discussing fucking each other, then tell me what you were talking about. Tell me and I'll obliterate Maddie's memories of who I am and she can return home." Thomas' face and voice softened, and he released his grip on Mione's hair, taking her hand in his as he pleaded with his wife. "Please, Mione, tell me you weren't discussing fucking him, and I'll get down on my knees and beg for your forgiveness."

Mione couldn't tell him; the oaths she'd made to Sirius preventing her from revealing the truth; not that she would have told him anyway even if she could have. "I can't."

"Then I'm not left with a lot of choice about what I should believe, am I?" Thomas' voice and face turned cold again as he dropped Mione's hand. "I just hope he was worth it because you've just seen your daughter for the last time because you couldn't keep your legs closed."

At the mention of Maddie, Mione completely lost it and screamed at Thomas. "I haven't fucking well slept with him. You're the only man I've made love with since we started dating." Mione took a deep breath trying to control her fear and anger, and her voice took on a tinge of desperation as she tried to make her husband see reason. "Doesn't what we shared the night we last made love mean anything to you?"

Thomas denied that it had. "No, because what we shared was a lie, Mione, and while I thought I was making love to someone I cared deeply for, and who felt the same in return, I wasn't; I simply fucked a lying whore." As he was speaking, Thomas removed his wands, and placed them out of Mione's reach on top of a cupboard. He then removed his cufflinks and began to unfasten his shirt.

Realizing that he intended to finish what he'd started, Mione began to back away as Thomas advanced on her. "Please don't, Thomas. Not like this."

"Exactly like this." When Mione could retreat no further, Thomas drove his fingers in his wife's hair and covered her mouth with his.

The Font Garden

Lachesis glanced at her mother who looked completely unperturbed. "You knew this would happen."

"I did." Nyx confirmed.

"But she's suffered enough." Lachesis couldn't stop shaking from anger. "You could have stopped this."

"The play has to unfold as it's meant to." Nyx denied that she could have done anything.

"Play?" Lachesis' voice was full of suspicion as she stared at her mother. "What's happened isn't just coincidental, is it?"

"It's not." Nyx had been surprised that Lachesis hadn't worked it out before. "Everything that has happened since H.J. initiated the ritual to take him back in time has happened because of me."

"The ritual didn't fail; you interfered with it." Lachesis stepped backwards as shock recoiled through her. "Mother, how could you?"

"I have my reasons, and I'll be happy to tell you what they are when the time is right." Nyx glanced back into the font. "But for the moment I suggest you continue watching because we've reached the beginning of the end, and you're about to witness love dying."

Castrum House 11.15a.m.

Remus shot to his feet when Mione was returned. "Mione?"

Mione couldn't answer him for crying. Remus hurried over to her, his senses telling him what had happened. "Oh Merlin, Mione." He put his arm around her.

Despite what Thomas had done to her, Mione trusted Remus, and desperate for comfort, she tried to get closer to him as he held her.

Feeling her breast brush against his arm, Remus realized that the blouse she was wearing had been ripped open. Pulling off what was left of his shirt, he wrapped it around her. "I'm so sorry, Mione. I should have done more to protect you."

Mione didn't respond and continued to sob against Remus until eventually her tears abated. When they did, she was finally able to tell him what had happened, her voice sounding disbelieving as she told Remus of the ordeal Thomas had put her through. "I never thought he would do something like that to me."

Remus decided not to point out that Thomas had done the same to her mother, albeit vicariously through others. "Mione, he's a lowlife bastard."

"I know; I've always known but I chose to ignore it because I loved him." Mione thought back to what Thomas had revealed. "And he's used that love against me. But that's not the worst thing he's done. Remus, he has my daughter."

"Maddie?" Remus queried.

Mione confirmed his guess. "Yes. She knows who he is, Remus. She has her own rooms here. He brought her here to see me, and she told me all about how Daddy let her decorate the rooms and pick her own things."

"Merlin." Even knowing Thomas as he did, Remus was taken aback. "How could he expose his own daughter to a place like this?"

"Because she's his heir here as well as for the Corporation." Mione repeated what Thomas had told her. "And what frightens me the most is that she'd do anything for Thomas."

Remus knew how attached the young girl was to Thomas, more so than to Mione. "Has he announced that she's his heir yet?"

"I don't think so. He said he won't begin her training until she turns nine." Mione wished she could see Remus' face in the dark so that she'd have some idea of what he was thinking. "And on top of that, I'm almost certain now that we're right about Regulus being Amicus. As you pointed out, he's not only been Thomas' best friend for years, but Maddie calls him 'Uncle' just as she does with you, and she left happily with Amicus to go to her rooms. She knows who's behind the mask, Remus."

Remus couldn't help but agree. "I think you're right but it doesn't really help us."

"Nothing can help us, Remus." Mione had resigned herself to her fate. "Nothing or no-one."

The two then fell silent as they both contemplated what they'd learnt, and what was ahead.

Hogwarts - 1pm

Thomas strolled in through the main doors of the Great Hall, a frightened hush falling over the students when they realized who'd just walked in. "Good afternoon, Headmaster."

James rose to his feet. "Dominus."

"You're looking a lot better than you did on our last encounter." Thomas remarked, not realizing that James was entirely au fait with who was behind his mask. "At the time I thought you'd taken your last breath."

"Sorry to disappoint you." James felt dismay as almost twenty students from various Houses stood to take their places by the forty or so Death Eaters that had followed Thomas in.

"It's a problem that can always be rectified if you fail to do as I ask." Thomas stood leaning against the doorway. "Now let's get down to business."

Castrum House – Harry's rooms – 2.30pm

Just as she'd known something was dreadfully wrong a few days earlier when Harry had had to torture Remus, Cassandra knew that something just as awful must have happened again when Harry said nothing but headed straight to the drinks tray and poured them both brandies. "He's killed them already, hasn't he?"

Harry passed the glass of brandy to Cassandra. "Sit down."

"Just tell me." Cassandra demanded.

"Thomas took Hogwarts this afternoon." Harry took a slug of the brandy.

"How is that possible?" Cassandra knew that her Uncle had the school warded and locked down, including the secret entrances that existed.

"He had insider help." Having been excluded from the offensive, Harry had been told what had happened by Cedric. "Some of the students who were on his side had managed to repair a vanishing cabinet that was stored in the Room."

Cassandra had been told by H.J. about the Draco Malfoy he'd known using the ploy to get Death Eaters into Hogwarts. "Thomas stole the idea from H.J., didn't he?"

"He must have." Harry didn't know for sure. "But he's beginning the purge he started in his former world. The Muggleborns have been obliviated and removed from the school."

"How predictable; following the same pattern he did before." Cassandra knew from Harry's white face though that there had to be more. "Your Dad and stepfather?"

"Both fine." Harry took another mouthful of Dutch courage before breaking the bad news. "But when Dad initially refused to co-operate and hand over the wards to Hogwarts to Thomas, Thomas made an example of one of the teachers."

Cassandra could barely bring herself to ask. "Which one?"

"Orion." Harry went on reluctantly. "After torturing him, Thomas executed him. Dad then agreed to do as he was ordered to."

Cassandra burst into tears. "Why choose my brother?"

"Because I believe Thomas wanted Dad to know that he wasn't messing around. If Katherine hadn't been pregnant again, he would have used her instead." Cedric had told Harry that Orion had stepped in front of his wife when Thomas had ordered her to join him; Orion demanding that Thomas leave Katherine alone, and declaring that she was expecting a baby. "Orion took Katherine's place, and Thomas showed no mercy, not even when Dad got on his knees and begged him to spare Orion, and this time there was no Mione or Cammie there to temper Thomas' actions."

"Do you think that what's happened with Mione has contributed to how Thomas acted?" Cassandra tried to rally as she attempted to get to the bottom of her brother's death.

"Yes." Ever since Thomas had found Remus and Mione together, he'd been constantly angry with everything and everyone. Even Cammie, who was one of the few there who wasn't really as frightened of Thomas as the others were, had avoided trying to rile him. "I'm really sorry, Cassandra."

"This is going to kill Dad." Cassandra gave up trying to stop her tears as they trickled unrelentingly down her cheeks. "Mum gave up her life so that Ori could be born, and it was all for nothing."

Harry reminded Cassandra that that wasn't true. "Ellie and her unborn sister aren't nothing."

Cassandra was terribly afraid for them. "You said that Thomas would have used Katherine but didn't because she was pregnant. What about Ellie?"

"She's being held with Katherine in their rooms." Harry had questioned Cedric about his sister and niece's whereabouts as soon as he'd heard about Orion. "I'm afraid I don't know anything about anyone else in Hogwarts except for the people I've told you about."

Cassandra had intended to ask about Nicole but Harry's declaration forestalled the question. "What about the Watchers' Academy?"

"Thomas took that as well." Harry did know more about that. "Being slayers, the girls there didn't give up easily."

"How many died?" Cassandra suspected that it would have been a bloody affair.

"More than half." Harry rubbed the back of his neck. "Buffy and the girls weren't there though. Because of what's happened to Remus, I know that they're staying with Uncle Sirius."

"How could you know that? You said that you couldn't contact Dad." In spite of her misery, Cassandra honed in on the anomaly in Harry's speech.

"I can't tell you." Harry had been told by Regulus who'd seen Buffy when he'd had dinner with Sirius the previous night, and Harry couldn't tell Cassandra that without giving Regulus' identity away.

Cassandra accepted Harry's statement without argument. "So does this mean that you can get a message to Dad?"

"No." Harry couldn't. "I told you that Thomas had this place under lockdown, and that now includes me as well. At the moment, only Thomas, Amicus and Cammie can freely move around. He's taking no chances that anyone will interfere with what he has planned for Mione and Uncle Remus."

"Then they're going to die as well." Cassandra began to cry in earnest, and Harry took her into his arms as she wept for her brother.

Castrum House – 3pm

As Remus cradled Mione, he could feel her anxiety growing as the day wore on. "Do you want to talk about something?"

"Not really." Mione could only focus on one thing. "The conversation would inevitably lead back to my husband."

"We can't just sit here like this. How about telling me about your childhood?" Remus knew that Mione had had a happy childhood but he didn't know much more than that about it.

"I don't want to discuss something wonderful like that in a place like this." Mione was aware she'd start crying if she thought about Severus, Virginie and her siblings. "How about your childhood?"

"I'd rather not." Remus didn't want to be reminded about Rupert. "How about discussing work instead?"

Even though it would be an exercise in futility, Mione grasped onto the subject. "I had a desk full of reviews to go over. I was going to give Steven a D Minus for his efforts."

Remus smiled ruefully. "Mione, what he did to me is long in the past."

"Unlike what's happening to you now." Mione swore softly under her breath. "Shit. I'm sorry. I knew that the conversation would turn back to this."

"It's a little hard to ignore the situation at the moment, isn't it?" Remus' own thoughts had been filled with the man who'd signed their death warrants. "Mione, you have to let me tell Thomas the truth. If he loves you, he'll understand. It's still not too late."

Mione refused yet again, as she had done every time Remus had brought the subject up. "Remus, it's bad enough I've got your blood

on my hands without adding to it. The answer is always going to be no. I've caused enough damage already."

"Mione, this isn't your fault." Remus wished Mione would understand that.

"But it is." Mione refused to accept that it wasn't. "I should never have slept with him again."

Remus really didn't blame Mione for sleeping with Thomas, especially after what he knew he would have been willing to do to save his own marriage. "To be honest, I'm surprised you held out this long."

"I should have held out longer." Mione deeply regretted what she'd done. "But oh no, not me; I put my needs before the needs of my friends and my family."

Remus began to make excuses for Mione. "You only did it because you love him, Mione, and..."

"Don't, Remus; don't defend what I did." Mione's voice was hard and of self-recrimination. "And now because I was selfish, my daughter is paying the price." Her voice broke revealing her turmoil. "How could he have used Maddie like that?"

"Because he's a scumbag who wanted to hurt you." Remus' voice reflected his hatred for Thomas. "And he succeeded."

"He has, and I hate him for doing that to our daughter, and for what he did to me afterwards." Mione swiped at her eyes. "And as terrible as it sounds, it would have been far better if he'd just taken what he wanted. For me what he did was far worse. I feel so dirty; so ashamed, Remus."

"Please listen to me, Mione." Remus stroked her cheek with his hand in the darkness. "Thomas is wholly at fault for this. You've been married to him for eight years, and he knows your body better than anyone."

"But I..." Mione swallowed as she remembered how Thomas had easily manipulated her.

"Sh." Remus placed a finger over Mione's lips, his thumb brushing across her cheek. "Just because you reacted to his touch, doesn't take away the fact that it was still rape. Thomas is the one who should feel unclean for doing that to you as the man is a worthless piece of shit, and he's never deserved you."

Mione wasn't convinced by Remus' words. "But I deserved what happened to me." She stopped Remus from speaking. "Don't say that I didn't. I did. He may have started off by forcing me, but I gave in to him. In the end I let him do what he wanted."

Remus could feel wetness under his thumb as he continued to stroke Mione's face. "You didn't let him, Mione. You just weren't strong enough to stand up to him."

"It still doesn't change the outcome." Mione could still hear her own cries ringing in her ears.

Remus tried approaching the problem from a different angle. "Tell me, Mione, did you want to have sex with him? Did you at any time refuse?"

"I kept telling him no but he wouldn't listen." Mione had continued begging even when her body had begun to react to Thomas' touch. "But I stopped saying no in the end."

Remus wished Mione could see his face so that she'd know that he meant every word he was about to say, and he tried to inject as much feeling into his words as he could so that he'd get his point across. "Mione, what happened between the two of you was not consensual sex; Thomas raped you. You said no, and he took what he wanted anyway. It wasn't your fault that your body betrayed you, and you've got nothing to be ashamed about."

"I wish I could believe you." Mione's voice was filled with pain and self-doubt. "But I can't."

Remus tried again. "Mione, you are a beautiful, loving and wonderful person who's done nothing wrong, except to love a man who isn't even fit to crawl on his belly at your feet."

Remus' words slowly began to register with Mione. "Remus, I tried; I really did but I couldn't stop him, and when he told me I deserved what was happening to me, I stopped fighting because I believed him."

Remus continued to build on what he'd what he was telling her. "Mione, even though you gave in, you didn't deserve it; no woman ever deserves treatment like that. And you have to stop blaming yourself; I don't blame you for how you reacted to Thomas, and I'm the one who's about to die with you. But even though I know I'm going to die, I wouldn't change a single thing about what's happened to me because it's shown you Thomas' true soul, and what he's capable of."

"How can you defend me like this?" Mione continued to self-flagellate.

Remus' voice was forceful in the darkness. "Because he's not worth your tears or your self-condemnation. Place the blame where it truly belongs, on his shoulders. He's the one abusing your daughter, and he's the one who took away your ability to say no. Hate that bastard, and not yourself."

Mione thought about what Remus was trying to tell her, and she finally realized that he was right. "I do hate him, Remus. I hate him so much for what's he done to me, to Maddie and to you. And even though it's come too late to help you, it's time I admitted to myself that I was living a lie. I loved a man who didn't really exist; a man I thought I knew, but obviously I was wrong, and that man has gone forever, as has my love for him." Mione reached up and touched Remus' face. "And I'm so very sorry that you had to go through this for me to recognize that."

"I understand, Mione." Remus kissed Mione's fingers as they brushed across his lips. "And I know how much it hurts when you discover that your life isn't the fairytale you believe it is. But I don't want you to

blame yourself for what's going to happen to me. This is how it's meant to be."

"I wish things could be different, and that it was just me alone facing this." Mione stroked Remus' cheek as he'd done with hers. "But if I had to be stuck here with anyone, then I'm glad that's it you. You're my best friend, and next to my children and Harry, you're the person I care most about in the world, and it's because of you that I've been able to get through this so far."

"Mione, I..." Remus hesitated, before changing what he was going to say, not wanting to burden Mione with his feelings.. "Mione, I feel the same way about you, and, even though I'm going to die, right now; right at this moment, there's nowhere else I want to be except here with you and holding you like this."

As Remus' words sank in, Mione experienced a surge of warmth towards him. "Promise me you won't let me go."

"I promise." Remus kissed Mione forehead. "I'm going to be here for you until the end."

Even though she was going to die later that day, Mione felt safe in Remus' arm, and she suddenly knew what she wanted more than anything else in the world. "Remus, would you do something important for me?"

"There's not much I can do in here." Remus wondered what she wanted. "But if I can do it, then yes, I will."

Her voice quivering, Mione made a request of him. "Remus, will you make love to me?"

Next Chapter: Remus answers Mione's question; Tonks is upset when Sirius refuses to help her; Maddie demonstrates exactly how powerful she is.

Chapter 73: The Best Laid Plans...

Castrum House - 3.15pm

"What?" Remus could believe what Mione had just asked of him.

"I want you to make love to me." Mione repeated.

"Mione, have you forgotten where we are?" Remus reminded her. "If he found us like that..."

Mione shrugged. "It's not as if he can do much worse to us than he's already going to."

"Mione, even though it's him you're married to, after Julia, I couldn't do it." Remus apologized. "I'm sorry."

"You've just pointed out to me what a bastard Thomas is." Mione placed her fingers over Remus' lips, when he started to interrupt her. "He took off my rings, Remus. He no longer considers me his wife; just his whore."

Moving her hand, Remus tried to reason with her. "Mione, I know you're upset, and..."

"Upset?" Mione thought the word was a gross understatement of how she was feeling. "Remus, I'm more than upset. I'm going to die tonight and I'm scared out of my wits." Her voice broke as she tried not to cry again. "I don't want my last time to be with him, Remus; not like that."

"But, Mione..." Remus went to protest again, only for Mione's hurt voice to stop him.

"Despite what you said, you didn't mean it, did you? You're disgusted with me and just didn't want to tell me." Mione let her fears and beliefs come flooding back.

"Never, ever think that." Remus denied it. "I meant every word I said."

Believing him, Mione thought of another reason why he'd refused. "Then I've embarrassed you, haven't I? I'm sorry, Remus, I shouldn't have presumed that you'd even want to make love to me." She gave a shaky laugh. "Send an ambulance crew to the mountainside; this plane has crashed and burned."

Remus smiled in the darkness at the Muggle comment. "Mione, I wouldn't be sending for the rescue services just yet."

"You mean that you would want to?" Mione was suddenly glad of the same darkness when she felt her cheeks burning as she asked the question.

Remus' smile vanished. "I'd be a liar if I said I didn't find you attractive, and hadn't thought about what it would be like to make love to you."

Mione's face grew even hotter. "I never contemplated that you'd ever thought about me like that."

"And yet you still asked me to make love you." As he made his remark, Remus was arguing with himself in his head as to why he just hadn't said yes; ethics be damned. But he couldn't change who he was, and he questioned Mione's motives. "Mione, have you ever considered it before now, or is it just the situation we're in that made you ask?"

"I..." Mione started and then stopped. "It's hard to be honest, even knowing that you can't really see me."

"If you can't be honest at a time like this..." Remus left the rest of the sentence unspoken.

"You're right." Mione lifted her chin and told him the truth. "Yes, I have thought about you like that, and, more fool me, I felt bloody guilty for doing so because of Thomas."

"It's only natural. I know most men do it, whether they're married or not. And I suspect women are no different." Remus shared his own belief. "Personally I don't see anything wrong with a little window shopping as long as it doesn't progress to shoplifting."

Mione giggled in spite of herself. "Only you could analogize it like that." She then let him into what she thought had been a secret. "While we're about honest about this, I should tell you that I had the most awful crush on you when I was at Hogwarts, even though I was seeing Harry."

"I know." Remus grinned. "But that's okay, because I had one on you as well."

"Really?" Mione was surprised to hear that.

"Honest to Merlin." Remus held up his hand, then realized that Mione hadn't got the same sort of vision he had. Lowering it, he went on. "You were quite something then; not that you're not now." Remus didn't want Mione thinking that she'd gone down in his estimation. "Believe me, it isn't everyday you find a beautiful young woman who likes you, and is actually intelligent enough to hold an interesting and thought-provoking conversation with."

"So are you saying you liked me for my brains or my looks?" Mione couldn't believe that they seemed to be flirting.

"I liked the whole package, Mione. It was hard not to, especially when you wore those short skirts." Remus continued with the flirting. "So why did you like me?"

"You were the hottest professor there, and something of a mystery." Mione was struggling to concentrate as Remus' fingers were now stroking her face. "You still are."

"There's nothing mysterious about me." Remus could feel Mione's heart rate starting to increase as he continued to brush her cheeks with his fingertips. "I've told you pretty much everything about me."

"Except for who the mystery woman is that you're in love with." Mione pointed out. "Will you tell me now?"

"No." Remus refused in a teasing voice. "If you haven't guessed by now, then you don't deserve to know."

Mione was frustrated by his gentle refusal. "That's not fair."

"Life isn't fair; just look at where we are." Remus withdrew his hand as he realized he'd focused the conversation once more on their predicament. "Sorry. I brought the conversation back down to earth again, didn't I?"

Mione ignored his question in favor of one of her own. "Why did you stop touching me?"

Remus didn't answer the question directly. "You know why."

Mione did. "It's because you're afraid of where it will lead to, isn't it?"

"Yes." Remus forced himself not to touch Mione again. "It can't happen, Mione."

Mione challenged Remus' statement. "Why not, Remus? All I'm asking for is someone I care deeply about to make love to me, and to make my last time special." She suddenly thought of something else that might have made him refuse. "You're not still seeing Anna, are you?"

"I'm not." Remus had moved the relationship onto the more steady level of friendship; aware that anything else wasn't fair to either of them. "And it's not because of another relationship that I don't want to make love to you, because I do. But it's wrong, Mione."

"Remus, we're going to die in a few hours, and to be truthful, I really don't care about doing the right thing anymore." Mione protested. "I've done the right thing all of my life, and what has it gotten me? An early death, and having to watch my former husband from afar marry someone else. Then when I got a second chance, except for Harry, I had to leave everyone I loved behind in another world and I have no idea what's happening to them. And the real kicker is that I had the misfortune to marry the man who's at the root of every problem I've ever had to deal with."

About to refuse again, Remus hesitated as he let Mione's words sink in. Running his hand through his hair, Remus couldn't believe he was actually considering taking back his refusal, and he sighed heavily. "Mione, are you really sure you want this, and it's not just about revenge?"

"I am sure, and this hasn't got anything to do with Thomas and revenge; it's about what I want; what I need; what I want to share with you." Mione placed a trembling hand on his chest when she realized that Remus might have changed his mind. "Remus, if you truly care about me, then please, give me a memory I'll cherish for what little time I have left."

"Mione, I do care about you, much more than you'll ever realize." As he finished speaking, and now trembling himself, Remus dipped his head and almost reverently brushed his lips across Mione's, before applying more pressure as Mione's mouth parted slightly for him.

As Remus ran his tongue across her bottom lip, Mione was aware of how different Remus' lips felt in comparison to Thomas', not quite so soft, and slightly larger. As the kiss became more insistent, Mione reached out for Remus' face, and when she slid her tongue into his mouth, she was a little surprised when her stomach jolted as his tongue joined hers.

Even though he had no idea of how long it might be before they were disturbed, Remus didn't rush, and spent what he knew must have seemed like an eternity to Mione just kissing her. Needing to feel his touch, Mione took his hand and placed it on her breast, where Remus discovered that her nipple was already hard beneath his palm. Not sure whether it was that way from cold, fear or desire, Remus played gently with it until Mione moaned softly with what he was certain was desire. Grasping her by the arms, Remus lifted her up so that she was kneeling on his legs, and he was able to reach her breast with his mouth.

Mione sank her fingers into Remus' hair as his warm mouth enveloped her breast, his tongue drawing lazy circles around her still hardened nipple. He then began to afford the same attention to the breast, which up until then, had been neglected. Mione found herself

holding her breath when Remus released her arms, and his hands moved down her sides. When his hands slid up inside what was left of her skirt to push it out of the way, she gave a tiny murmur.

Recognizing the sound as one of need, Remus continued to tease Mione's breasts with his mouth, while one hand gently massaged her bottom and the other moved between her thighs. He felt her jump as his fingertips brushed across the most sensitive part of her body, before she shifted her position to allow him to touch her more intimately.

As with the kissing, Remus again didn't rush things, and took Mione to the edge, waiting until her body had begun to shake, and the small moans she had been making had morphed into a continual soft keening. With his own body now screaming for release, and cognizant of the fact that Mione was ready for him, Remus moved his hand to join the one already cupping her bottom, and he climbed to his feet, lifting Mione up with him.

Mione dropped her hands from Remus' hair to link them around the back of his neck as he raised her up. As she had just before Thomas had forced himself on her, Mione heard the familiar sound of a zipper, and she tensed, the euphoria Remus had created vanishing in her panic. She was aware that Remus must have sensed her sudden nerves when, rather than joining them together, he began to nuzzle her neck instead, while murmuring something she couldn't quite catch. Only once she'd relaxed again, did she feel Remus gently begin to push into her, and Mione began to pant as she sank down until he'd filled her completely.

Remus gave himself a moment to adjust to the feeling of Mione's warmth surrounding him, before leaning against the cold brick wall to brace himself and using his hands to begin a rocking motion. Tightening her grip around Remus' neck, Mione in turn steadied herself by locking her ankles together around the back of Remus' legs, making it easier for her to move with him. As the pace began to quicken, Mione softly began to keen in the base of her throat again. The noise was cut off, however, when Mione sought out Remus' mouth in the darkness, her tongue clashing with his, as she got closer to going over the edge. All thoughts of Thomas and his treatment of

her fled like shadows before a hot midday sun as Remus returned Mione's kiss. Little gasps began to get louder when Remus released her mouth and returned his attention to her neck; soft, loving words escaping his lips that he knew Mione wouldn't be able to hear but he had to say them.

Lost in their lovemaking, both forgot that they were in a prison cell; that they were going to die. All that mattered was that moment, and the way they felt. The moment, however, was going to end as Remus realized that the inevitable finale was upon him. His movements beginning to get erratic, Remus had experienced a familiar tightening beginning to creep into the pit of his stomach. And even though he fought to hold it back for just a little while longer, not wanting to let the precious moment end, the sounds Mione was making, combined with the hot warmth that surrounded him, proved too much. With a final thrust, Remus shouted out loud, his neck straining as his head arched backward as he held tightly to Mione while his body quaked with pleasure.

Mione had known what was going to happen as Remus had begun to judder and pull his mouth away from her neck. As Remus' release hit him, and she felt him spill into her, Mione's keening increased as heat exploded from the center of her stomach and sped out along her nerve paths until her entire body was shaking as much as his.

As their mutual trembling abated and Mione's head flopped onto his shoulder, with unsteady legs Remus slithered down the wall, Mione ending up on his lap. Not wanting his feelings for the woman he'd just made love with to remain buried after what they'd shared, Remus finally said the words he'd always wanted to. "Mione, I love you."

Still basking in a warm afterglow, Mione experienced yet another surge of warmth at Remus' words, and she kissed him gently, before giving him a soft smile, although she doubted that even he could see it in the darkness of their prison cell. "Remus, you didn't have to say that, but it was nice that you did."

"I'm not just saying it for the sake of the moment. Mione, I love you." Remus repeated, the intensity in his voice giving credence to his words. "I've always loved you."

"But what about the woman you said that you were in love with." Her brain still focused on what they'd just experienced, Mione missed the obvious inference.

"Mione, for someone who is the most intelligent woman I know, sometimes you can be a little bit obtuse when it comes to people and their feelings." Remus told her before returning the soft kiss that Mione had just given him.

As they broke apart, and Mione's brain filtered Remus' words, the startling truth hit her, and in the darkness, her mouth formed a circle. "Oh!"

"I see you've finally figured it out." Remus stroked her back. "I would never have told you normally but under the circumstances I wanted you to know what this meant to me."

"Oh, Remus." Mione's voice hitched. "I wish..."

Remus did as Mione had done earlier, and put his fingers over her lips. "Don't say it. It's enough knowing that, as you said earlier, I'll have this memory to cherish, even if it is for a short time."

BritAD - 4.15pm

Tonks hurried to Sirius' office, hoping he was in. Not bothering to knock she barged in. "Thomas has attacked Hogwarts."

Alarmed at the state of Tonks, Sirius rose from his desk. "How do you know that?"

"I tried to floo in as normal after school, but the entrance was blocked." Tonks was worried sick about her husband. "I was afraid something had happened, so I dropped little James off at your house before apparating to the gates. When I discovered that they were locked and I couldn't get in, even though I should have been able to, I made my way around to the edge of the Forest and went in that way. I couldn't get very close though; I could feel wards surrounding the

place, and there were Death Eaters patrolling the grounds. I didn't know what else to do but to come here."

Tonks' forage into the Forbidden Forest explained the scratches and bruises that she was covered in. "You did the right thing. I've hopefully got someone in the school who should be able to tell us what's going on." Just as Tonks had no idea that her stepson was spying for Sirius, Sirius also had none that Harry had been excluded from the foray.

"You're not going to do anything?" Tonks couldn't believe that Sirius wasn't going to storm the school. "It's your job to do something."

"Tonks, the last time we took Thomas on in an all out battle, I lost far too many good people. And the school is full of potential hostages that I'm not willing to risk." Sirius wasn't going to simply rush in this time as he had done on Azkaban. "So I'm going to wait to hear from my contact."

"But my husband is in there." Tonks wasn't usually one for crying but tears filled her eyes as she thought about James. "And so is your son, his wife and their daughter."

"I'm well aware of that." Sirius put his arm around Tonks. "As soon as Harry comes back, I'll send him out on a scouting mission."

"It's a full moon." Tonks reminded Sirius.

"I'd forgotten." Sirius had had other things on his mind. "Then I'll go, but alone." Sirius forestalled Tonks' offer to return with him. "At the moment I don't want to alert Thomas to the fact that we know what he's done. If I can get a chance to take the school back, then I'd rather do it via a surprise attack."

Tonks recognized the wisdom in Sirius' words. "I'll wait here."

"I think you should go back to my place." Sirius transfigured his clothing so that it was now black and dark-fitting. "Sit tight there, and don't do anything stupid." Trusting Tonks to do as he'd told her to, Sirius apparated out.

Sirius transformed on arriving a short distance from Hogwarts, and stealthily made his way into the Forest, taking care as it wasn't dark yet. After covering the perimeter of the school, he slipped away just as silently to head back to his home.

Grimmauld Place - 4.45pm.

Sirius was besieged by Tonks the minute he apparated in, Hermione standing with her. "You're right; he's definitely taken Hogwarts. I estimated at least twenty Death Eaters in the grounds alone."

Hermione had other news. "Harry came by just under an hour ago, and H.J. left with him. Harry said that Thomas has Mione and Remus."

"How did he work that out?" Sirius had been certain that this time Thomas wasn't involved.

"Harry didn't just question everyone who'd been on the floor at the time of the murder; he questioned the entire building." Hermione revealed. "Apparently a temporary janitor got missed off the list the first time round. When Harry questioned him, he didn't know anything about what had happened, but he had seen a man entering the building with a bouquet of white roses."

"How did Harry tie that to Thomas?" Sirius hadn't made the same connection Harry obviously had.

"Harry said that they're Mione's favorite flowers, and after reviewing his own memory, he recalled a slight odor that he'd barely taken any notice of the first time around." Hermione filled Sirius in on what Harry had hurriedly told her as he'd waited for H.J. "He thinks that Thomas must have gone to see Mione with the flowers, and something he saw or overheard triggered an attack."

Sirius wasn't finished with his questions. "But why didn't Harry come back and tell me? Why come here instead?"

"Because Harry believes that Thomas will kill Mione and Remus tonight as it's a full moon and it's Thomas' usual MO, and he wanted to say goodbye to H.J. in case he didn't make it out." Hermione's voice revealed her trepidation. "H.J. refused to let Harry go alone, saying that it was his fault that Mione was in this position in the first place. However, when they tried to apparate in, Harry couldn't get in, so he and H.J. have gone back to Castrum House via the gardens. Oh, and Harry said to tell you that they've stopped to collect your Manchester contact, if that makes sense."

"It does." Sirius wished he'd had a chance to speak to Harry but for now it was too late.

Castrum House - 4.45pm.

After locking Harry Potter in his cage just outside of the dungeons, Thomas apparated up to the room where Maddie was still playing cards with Regulus. He removed his mask when he saw his daughter recoil. "It's just me."

Maddie felt nervous when she saw the look on her father's face. "Daddy, are you angry?" Her voice came out tentatively.

"Yes." Thomas could see that he was frightening his daughter, and he sought to reassure her that it wasn't her fault. "But not with you."

"Are you angry with Mummy?" Maddie had noticed that Mione wasn't with her father, and she couldn't forget that her parents had seemed angry with each other earlier in the day.

"I am." Thomas knelt down in front of Maddie. "Maddie, this is going to be hard for you to understand. But your mother won't be coming home ever again."

Regulus interrupted as he knew what Thomas was about to tell Maddie. "Thomas, do you think this is a good idea?"

"She has to know at some time." Thomas turned his attention back to Maddie. "Maddie, your mother decided that she would rather be with Uncle Remus than with me."

"Is she with him now, Daddy?" Maddie didn't know why but she suddenly felt afraid for her mother.

"She is." Thomas answered truthfully.

"Are you angry with Uncle Remus?" As her father had mentioned Remus' name, Maddie realized that she'd never heard her father sound so cold nor seen him look so forbidding before.

"I am." Thomas' face reflected his disgust and ire.

Something Maddie couldn't miss, and given what she'd learnt about her father so far, she made a logical deduction. "And are you going to hurt him like you did with Auntie Cassandra?"

"No. I'm going to kill him." Thomas didn't lie about what he was going to do.

Maddie's hand tightened reflexively on the playing cards she was holding. "What about Mummy?"

"I..." Thomas couldn't answer and got up, turning away. Once he'd regained his composure he responded to his daughter's question, his back to her and his voice stern and final. "The same."

Maddie's heart began to race and she was filled with dismay. "You can't, Daddy. You promised you wouldn't ever hurt Mummy."

"No-one betrays me, Maddie. No-one." Thomas glanced around as a tiny rumble rippled through the building.

Maddie stood up. "But you promised, Daddy. You can't do it. I won't let you."

"I beg your pardon." Thomas couldn't believe his daughter was daring to stand up to him.

Tears began to fall. "But you said that you love Mummy and she loves you."

"Your mother doesn't love me. She's nothing but a..." Thomas didn't realize how angry he was, as he went to tell his daughter exactly what he thought of his wife.

Regulus stopped him. "Thomas, no. She doesn't need to hear it."

"Don't push it, Regulus." Thomas warned. "Even you have boundaries."

"Maybe so." Regulus acknowledged Thomas' warning. "But if stops you from doing something stupid, then I'm going to overstep them."

Maddie was suddenly terrified of her father as Thomas advanced on his friend. "Daddy, don't."

Thomas ignored his daughter's plea and pulled out his wand.

Watching him, Maddie's began to get hysterical. "Stop it, Daddy." When Thomas didn't answer her, Maddie's hysteria reached fever pitch. "Stop it. Stop it. Stop it." Her voice ended on a high-pitched scream.

Thomas span round as the building really began to shake. "Maddie, I need you to calm down. Take deep breaths for me."

"You can't hurt Mummy, Daddy." Maddie's hair started floating as if static electric had built up around her. "You promised. You promised, Daddy."

"Thomas, tell her you won't hurt anyone." Regulus had seen accidental magic do damage before but he had a horrible feeling that with Maddie's power, this time it wouldn't be good.

"Do not tell me what to do." Getting really pissed at Regulus for interfering, Thomas snapped at him. "Mione has betrayed me, and she..."

Thomas didn't get any further as Maddie stamped her foot, and tearfully screamed. "No!"

Regulus threw himself onto Maddie as he guessed what must have been every window in the building shattered and glass exploded everywhere, the house shaking violent. "Maddie, it's okay. He won't hurt them. I promise."

Having seen Thomas flying through the air from the backlash of her accidental magic, Maddie didn't believe Regulus. Frightened beyond words that her father was going to hurt her as well, she wriggled free and ran. Regulus pulled out his wand and aimed it at her. "Accio Maddie." Nothing happened. "What the hell?"

Thomas groaned, rubbing his head as he got to his feet, and noticed that his daughter was missing. "Where is she?"

For the first time ever, Regulus lost his temper with Thomas. "You stupid bastard; where do you think she is? You scared her half to death."

"Don't think this is over." Thomas warned Regulus as he headed for the door.

"Whatever." Regulus wasn't bothered by Thomas' threat. "We need to find her before she levels this place."

Both men broke into a sprint as a frightened scream rent the air.

Castrum House - 4.45pm.

Remus and Mione didn't make love again but they did spend what little time they had left exchanging comforting caresses and gentle kisses. Neither said anything about what Remus had revealed. The only interruption had come when a Death Eater entered and gave Remus the Wolfsbane that had been made for him.

Remus eventually glanced up at the ceiling. Even though Mione couldn't see him, she recognized the movement, and what it signified. "How long?"

"Soon." Remus tightened his arms around Mione. "After so long I know even without being able to see the time."

"I thought that might be the case." Mione buried her face into his neck. "Remus, I just..." Her voice trailed off as the door opened again.

Remus' arms tightened around Mione at the sight of the three silver masked Death Eaters. Remus knew Rupert was one of them, the second man he recognized as Lucius from Mione's memory of the Inner Circle, and the final one, a woman was Cammie. It was Cammie who made a demand of them. "Get up."

Remus set Mione aside and got to his feet, only for Lucius to shake his head. "Both of you. Now. We haven't got all night."

Mione took Remus' hand as he pulled her up, and she repeated the words that he'd uttered to her just after they'd finished making love. "I love you."

Remus knew she didn't mean it but at that moment he didn't care, and ignoring the three Death Eaters he lifted her to him, and kissed her long and lovingly, before lowering her to feet. "I love you too."

Lucius threw a cloak at Mione. "Wrap this around yourself."

Aware that Remus' tattered shirt was doing little to hide her breasts, Mione did as she was told. She was a little surprised when the other male Death Eater also passed his cloak to Remus. "What's going on?"

"Mione, the moon rises in just over fifteen minutes." 'Lucius' told her. "And some of us need to be locked away."

"Harry?" Mione's voice came out in a hopeful whisper.

"Yes, unless you believe that Malfoy is rescuing you." Harry bit out. "Now come on. No-one can apparate from down here, but Cammie is going to apparate you both out as soon as we reach the common areas." Even though Harry had plenty of questions about what he'd just witnessed, he decided that they could wait.

As they hurried up the stairs, Harry had a question for his niece. "Is Cass being held here?"

"Yes, she's in Potter's rooms." Cammie grabbed her Uncle's arm. "You can't be thinking of doing what I think you're going to."

"I'm not leaving without my wife." Harry headed determinedly along the corridor. "I won't be able to apparate her out of the house given the lockdown, but I should have enough time to apparate her to where we got in."

H.J. had no intention of leaving Harry to do it alone. "I'm coming with you, Harry."

Cammie also refused to leave. "I'll get Aunt Mione and Remus out and then I'll come back for you. You might need me."

Harry didn't like the idea but Cammie swore she'd apparate both him and H.J. out if he didn't agree to let her accompany them.

Cammie then gave the two men a warning. "I think Potter's sitting room has an eavesdropping spell over it, so don't say anything to give yourselves away once you're inside." Cammie had come to the conclusion about the room, after Thomas had mentioned something she'd discussed when it had just been her and Cassandra in the room.

At the bottom of the stairs, Harry gave Cammie instructions where to apparate to. Cammie frowned as nothing happened. "I can't apparate out."

"Try a site to site hop." Harry suggested.

Letting go of Mione and Remus, Cammie apparated two feet away. "It looks as though Uncle Thomas has blocked all outbound apparation but not area to area. But how am I going to get them out now?"

"The wards have been extended to about three miles north of where you got me out." Harry quickly filled her in on how she was going to

do it. "You can obviously apparate within the wards, so I need you to apparate them both there."

Remus glanced up at the ceiling as the moon's pull began to get stronger. "Harry, you're not going to have time to get Cassandra out."

"Yes, I am." Harry knew that this would be his only chance. "Now get out."

Cammie grabbed the couple's hands again, and vanished. When she reappeared, she handed Mione her spare wand. "I don't want to leave you unprotected. I'm not sure how much further the edge of the wards are. I've got to go back."

Mione began running, Remus holding her hand. "How much longer until you change?"

"Five minutes or so." Remus estimated. Suddenly he hit a painful wall of nothingness. "I think I've found the wards."

"Remus?" A voice came out of the falling darkness.

"Anna." Remus identified who'd called out to him. "Can you open the wards and get Mione out?"

"Not without Harry." Anna had expected him to be with them. "Where is he?"

"Gone after Cassandra." Remus sat down.

"Bloody fool." Anna was angry that Harry had risked the couple's safety when they were so close to getting out.

As she thought about her daughter and the others still in Castrum House, Mione had an idea. "Anna, do you carry a Muggle mobile?"

"Yes." Anna pulled it out of her pocket. "Why?"

"Dial this number for me." Mione called out the number.

Anna keyed it in. "I'm not sure it will work this close to the wards."

"Please just try, and put it on speaker phone for me." Mione wanted to jump for joy as she heard the faint ringing. "Pick up. Pick up."

"Hello?" A hesitant voice answered.

"Theresa, it's Mione." Mione stopped her children's nanny from expressing her relief. "I'm safe but the children aren't. I need you to take the emergency portkey I gave you, and take Nat and Bella. Don't stop to pick anything up. Just get my children out."

Theresa remembered what else Mione had told her. "What's the password?"

"The End of the World." Mione gave it to her. "Now please, just get them out."

As the phone at the other end went dead, Anna closed up her own phone. "But you live in a magical area."

"I adapted the phone." Mione explained. "But Theresa's phone is the only I've managed to get to work. Every other time the charm has failed, and I don't know why."

Anna's attention was caught elsewhere as she spotted something Mione hadn't. "Mione, get back. He's about to start changing."

At that moment, just a short distance away, Cammie reappeared with H.J. and Maddie, who was unconscious. Cammie was arguing with H.J. as he tugged her towards the others. "You should have left me. Uncle Harry's still in there."

"He's going to change in a few minutes, Cammie." H.J. argued. "And Wolfsbane or no, I wasn't leaving you there."

Mione gathered her daughter to her, relieved beyond words that she'd somehow managed to end up with her. "How did you..?"

She was cut off by Anna who could see Remus struggling to hold back the change. "Explanations can wait. Cammie, do you have a Dark Mark?"

"Yes, why?" Cammie asked.

"When a blue light appears, destroy it with your wand but keep the wand trained on the yellow light that will appear in its place." Anna began to retrace the steps she'd taken before to open a window in the wards; her familiarity with them making it a far quicker process than it had been earlier that evening. "And don't move until I tell you to."

As soon as the blue light appeared, Cammie did as she was told, keeping still. "Now what?"

Anna snapped out commands. "Mione, bring Maddie and make your way to this side. H.J., and Remus, you too."

Remus suddenly doubled up. "Get away from me."

Mione shoved her daughter back into H.J.'s arms. "Take her for me."

H.J. realized what Mione was going to do. "He's changing, Mione. It's too late."

"I'm not leaving him." Mione turned her borrowed wand on Remus. "Mobilicorpus." She had to struggle to hold him as he writhed and twisted, the change making it difficult to keep him airborne.

Cammie stood her ground as Remus was floated onto the other side of the wards. "Aunt Mione, get through."

Mione stepped through the gap, keeping an eye on Remus. "Cammie, come on."

"She can't let the ward go." Anna needed Cammie to keep the wards open. "Mione, when I say mark, summon her."

Mione readied herself, and when Anna reached one, she opened her mouth. As the word 'mark' left Anna's mouth, Mione called out. "Accio Cammie."

Cammie flew forward, the wards snapping back into place as she landed on the floor. "Is that how Uncle Harry got in?"

"Yes." Anna swung around. "Shit."

Mione stepped in front of her daughter and H.J. "But they gave him Wolfsbane."

"Does it look as if it's working?" Anna grabbed Cammie's arm as Remus leapt forward growling. "We're leaving."

"But..." Mione didn't get a chance to protest as H.J. grabbed her and vanished.

Grimmauld Place

Sirius quickly spotted who was missing. "Where's Harry and Remus?"

"He refused to leave without Cassandra, and we had to leave Remus behind after getting him out of the wards; he'd changed." H.J. explained quickly.

"So why are Maddie and Cammie with you?" Sirius asked.

Mione wanted to know the same thing about her daughter. "And why is Maddie unconscious?"

"She was absolutely hysterical, Mione." H.J. quickly filled her in. "We had to stun her to stop Thomas tracing her through her ring to the area where I knew you'd be."

"Tell me what happened from the beginning." Sirius demanded.

Cammie stopped her father from doing so. "Dad, there's something I have to tell Sirius first."

"Merlin, Cammie." Hermione thought she'd heard her daughter's voice, and she came running down the hallway, only to draw to a halt as Cammie held up her hand. "Mum, not now."

Sirius was a little surprised at Cammie's attitude, as he'd expected her to throw herself into Hermione's arms. "What do you want to talk to me about?"

"Not here." Cammie didn't want to break bad news to him with an audience.

"There's something I need to talk to you about as well, so let's go." Sirius stood aside. "Last door on the left. I'll be there in a moment." Sirius suddenly reached out. "I'll need your wands."

"Mione has my spare wand." Cammie unstrapped her main wand. "Here." After giving it to Sirius, she headed down the corridor, only to turn around when she realized what room he was sending her to.

Sirius blocked her path as she tried to return. "Going somewhere?"

Cammie stood her ground. "We can't talk in there."

Sirius took her arm. "It's a little late if you're worried that I'll spot the ring."

"Sirius, no." Cammie tried to pull back but Sirius propelled her forward.

Once inside the room, Sirius let go of her. "Why him, Cammie?" He turned to the tapestry and pointed. "Why my..."

Cammie closed her eyes as she realized that Sirius had seen that the year of death had been filled in next to his son's name. "I'm so very sorry. It happened this afternoon."

Sirius could barely believe what he was seeing, and he staggered backwards as if he'd been hit. "Were you there?"

"No." Cammie wished she had been though. "Uncle Thomas refused to let me go."

"How can you call him Uncle?" Sirius snapped, as he struggled with his shock and grief.

"Because any disrespect by me is punishable." Cammie informed him. "By..."

Sirius could hear the hate in Cammie's voice as she trailed off unable to speak Harry's name, and he finished the sentence off for her. "By Harry, I know. But he didn't have any choice."

"He could have turned to you; to Uncle Harry. I couldn't." Cammie couldn't help the vehemence in her voice.

"So instead you turned to my brother?" Sirius' voice reflected the disgust he felt. "Why, Cammie?"

"You really want to know that at a time like this?" Cammie couldn't believe Sirius wanted to discuss Regulus after what he'd just learnt about his son.

"We're going to my study." Sirius couldn't bear to be in the same room as the tapestry. "And yes, I want to know."

Five minutes later, Cammie found herself seated opposite Sirius, who'd taken a calming potion. "So what do you want to know?"

"Whatever you can tell me." Sirius studied the girl who was sitting calmly across from him.

"Okay." Cammie thought back. "Reg and I became friends when he started helping me to try and master the killing curse, when Harry failed."

"And Reg succeeded, didn't he?" Sirius couldn't keep the sarcasm out of his voice.

"Uncle Harry was there, wasn't he?" Cammie correctly guessed who'd seen the demonstration.

"You don't need to know how I know. It's enough that you know that I'm aware that you've killed, Cammie." Sirius saw a strange look cross Cammie's face. "There's something you aren't telling me."

"It's something I can't tell you." Cammie emphasized the word 'can't'. "Can I continue?"

"Please do." Sirius was surprised by the young woman's polish and apparent unflappability.

"You were right. I mastered the killing curse with Regulus' help, and one thing led to another and we became friends." Cammie didn't go into detail.

"And when did you become lovers?" Sirius questioned.

"That's none of your business." Cammie had no intention of discussing that part of her relationship with Sirius.

"It is when you're carrying my nephew." Sirius responded.

"No, I'm not." Cammie denied Sirius' statement.

"Come with me." Sirius grabbed Cammie's arm and apparated them both back into the tapestry room. "Now tell me you aren't carrying my nephew."

Cammie's hand flew to her mouth as she saw her own name linked to Regulus', and a single line trailing down, with the word 'Male' beneath it. "This can't be right."

"I changed the tapestry to reflect any unborn children and their sex after Faith almost died carrying Siri." Sirius could see that Cammie really hadn't known. "It's how we found out about you and Regulus, and I had to face the truth about who he really is." Sirius looked across back to his son's name. "Was he there when Orion died?"

Cammie sat down on a chair, her legs no longer wanting to keep her upright. "Someone else told us what had happened; Reg was pretty shook up about it."

"Not shook up enough to leave." Sirius wanted to get angry but the calming potion didn't let him. "I want to know what happened."

"James refused to pass the wards to Un... Thomas, so I think he was going to make an example of Katherine as a form of lesson for James. Orion apparently defended her, and told Thomas she was pregnant." Cammie glanced at the tapestry. "Another daughter."

"Go on." Sirius didn't want to discuss his grandchildren at that moment.

"Thomas made Orion take Katherine's place; he then tortured him before killing him." Cammie wiped away a tear. "He's part of the reason why I decided to help Aunt Mione and Remus."

"Why only part?" Sirius apparated them both out of the tapestry room and back into his study.

"I found out this afternoon that Thomas intends to make Maddie his heir, and that he's given her her own rooms." Cammie had been disgusted when she'd gone looking for Regulus and had found him in the previously empty suite of rooms.

Sirius knew why Cammie looked like that. "You didn't want her to be forced to join him, as you had been, did you?"

Cammie wondered how Sirius had known but she didn't ask, not expecting him to tell her. "I didn't. She's just a kid. Anyway, I started talking to her, and I was surprised when she remembered me. She told me that Mione wasn't really missing, and that she'd seen her in Thomas' rooms." Cammie swallowed hard as she recalled the sight that had met her eyes when the cell door had opened. "I had no idea what Aunt Mione had been doing in there until I saw the state of her clothes this evening. I thought that Thomas had just been talking to her."

Sirius hadn't paid much attention to clothing as Mione had been covered by the cloak Harry had given to her. "What was wrong with them?"

"They were in tatters. I think Thomas raped her." Cammie had known by the way Mione had clung to Remus that it hadn't been him. "Was she having an affair with Remus?"

"No." Sirius denied it. "Is that why Thomas attacked them?"

"Yes." Cammie confirmed. "I thought it was true, especially after this evening. When we opened the cell to help them escape, before they realized we were there to help them, Aunt Mione kissed Remus and told her she loved him, and he told her the same back."

"It doesn't mean that they were having an affair. Both of them believed they were going to die." Sirius was, however, curious to find out what had gone on between his friend and Mione. "I need to talk to Mione. I suggest you return home with your parents but consider yourself under house arrest." He handed Cammie's wand back. "I don't have time to put you through withdrawal right now."

"Thank you." Cammie reholstered her wand as she got to her feet. "And again, I am sorry about Orion."

Sirius believed the regret to be heartfelt. "Thank you." He escorted Cammie back to the sitting room to find only Hermione, Mione, Faith, and Buffy, who'd joined them. "Where is everyone else?"

"Tonks has taken Theresa and all of the children, including our two, over to her place, and H.J. and Anna have returned to Castrum House in case they can get Harry out before morning." Faith got to her feet. "Sirius, are you alright?"

"Not exactly." Sirius turned to Mione. "I need to talk to you."

"I'm coming with you." Faith already knew what had happened to Mione, and had provided her with fresh clothing.

"I have to take her to the Ministry." Sirius told his wife.

Cammie frowned. "Why didn't you take me there?"

"Cammie, I don't want you anywhere Thomas can find you." Sirius rubbed his neck. "Then again, taking Mione there isn't a good idea either. I'm going to fetch a recording device, and I'll be straight back."

When Sirius didn't vanish, Faith questioned it. "So why are you still here?"

"I don't know." This time Sirius did vanish, only to return a few minutes later. "I can't get in, and the perimeter is crawling with Death Eaters."

"Seville has taken over the Ministry?" Buffy asked in a shocked voice.

"So it would seem." Sirius was reeling. "I'm going to have to conduct an informal interview here instead. After that I need to head out to the emergency meeting place for any Aurors not caught in the Ministry building." Sirius was confident in his Aurors that they'd follow procedure and head for the building, which had already been safeguarded against anyone with a Dark Mark entering it. So instead of joining them immediately, he sat down and Mione told him what had happened to her, but she omitted what Thomas had done, something Sirius noted. "Mione, you've changed your clothing, haven't you?"

"Yes." Mione started to chew nervously on her lip. "Faith gave me something of hers to put on."

Cammie got up and went to sit by her aunt. "Maddie told me you'd been in Thomas' rooms, and I saw the state of your clothing. Did he rape you?"

"Yes." Mione's voice dropped to little more than a whisper, as she enlarged on her comment. "And afterwards he called me a whore, and said that I hadn't even been that good, and that he would never have paid for my services."

Sirius blew out a breath. "I'm really sorry, Mione. Perhaps Remus was right after all, and we shouldn't have let you go back."

"It doesn't matter now." Mione then gave a tiny gasp and started to cry as the events of the last few days really hit her hard.

Cammie pulled her aunt against her. "Cry it out."

Hermione almost didn't recognize how self-assured and grown-up her daughter was. "Does Maddie know?"

Cammie answered in Mione's place. "I don't think so. She only said that both of her parents had seemed angry and wanted her out of the room, so Amicus took her and stayed with her all afternoon."

"So that's why he wasn't there when Thomas attacked Hogwarts." Sirius had wondered why. He glanced over at Faith. "I've got some bad news; Orion, he..."

Even with the calming potion, Sirius couldn't go on, and he dropped his head into his hands, prompting his wife to move to his side. "Sirius, I..." Knowing what he'd been about to say, Faith too found herself unable to complete her sentence as tears began to fall, and she held Sirius' head against her breast.

Hermione pulled out a tissue and wiped her own eyes as she thought about the pleasant young man. "Is Katherine okay?"

Cammie again took up the burden of answering. "Yes, and so is Ellie."

Buffy thought about her own home. "What about the Academy?"

"More than half of the girls died, Buffy." Cammie's voice was full of regret. "But not before they killed over thirty Death Eaters themselves."

"And how many girls did you kill?" Buffy's voice left no doubt in anyone's mind as to what she thought about Cammie. "I know that you've had the practice."

"I wasn't there, and I've never killed anyone." Cammie snapped, not thinking about what she'd just said.

Still dry-eyed but wan, Sirius looked up, and confirmed Cammie's earlier supposition that it had been her Uncle who'd witnessed the demonstration. "But Harry saw your first kill."

"He didn't see what he thought he did." Cammie, however, couldn't say anymore than that.

After recalling what his godson had discovered just before Cammie was supposed to have made her first kill, Sirius worked out what had really happened. "At that time, Harry thought that something had happened to Amicus, but it hadn't, at least not in the way that Harry had thought. Amicus was there wasn't he, but he took your place, so you wouldn't have to kill anyone. He knew you wouldn't be able to do it, and he's killed already, so he decided to save you from having to do the same, didn't he?"

"You're very good at coming to conclusions." Cammie couldn't come out and say it directly as she'd sworn an oath to Regulus to keep what he'd done a secret.

"So Amicus is your brother as we thought?" Faith wiped her eyes as she asked.

"He is." Sirius confirmed. "Look at the ring on Cammie's finger, as well as the evidence on the tapestry; he couldn't be anyone else."

Mione pulled herself together, and blew her nose. "I thought he was; I just couldn't prove it. He's the one person Thomas never introduced me to."

"Reg didn't want it." Cammie smiled wryly. "He was afraid that Maddie would give him away."

"How long has she known who Thomas and Regulus are?" Mione hoped that her niece could tell her.

"I don't know exactly, but I believe it's been a while." Cammie hadn't been able to find out from Regulus. "Last January, I thought I heard a little girl's voice in Thomas' rooms but when I stepped into the sitting room, I found it completely empty."

"Maddie should be able to tell you." Sirius decided. "I can't see Thomas forcing her to swear an oath."

Mione wasn't so sure. "Hopefully not, but once she has told us what we need to know, I want her obliterated."

Their chance to question Maddie came sooner than they expected, as Tonks appeared. "Maddie is having an episode."

Mione vanished, reappearing at her daughter's side. "Maddie, I'm here."

The air around Maddie immediately stopped crackling, and she burst into tears. "When I woke up and you weren't here, I thought Daddy had hurt you."

"I'm fine, baby. And Daddy can't get in here." Mione brushed her daughter's hair off her wet face, as Sirius and the others entered the room. "Uncle Sirius has some questions for you."

Unfortunately when Sirius tried to question her, Maddie refused to answer them. "My brains will be sucked out."

Faith recognized the stumbling block. "Thomas hasn't made her swear an oath exactly, but it looks as though Maddie has pinkie swore not to tell anyone about their secrets." She then explained about her and her children's way of keeping secrets.

Deciding to attack the problem using Legilimency, Sirius pulled out his wand, and within seconds the entire house began to shake. Cammie shook her head. "Put your wand away; you're frightening her."

As Sirius did so, the shaking abated, and he stared in stunned shock at Maddie. "That was accidental magic?"

Mione confirmed it was. "Maddie registers at over two hundred on the Magus scale, Sirius. When she's upset, things can sometimes get pretty hairy."

Sirius didn't need it explaining that accidental magic pretty much quadrupled the magnitude of a child's power. "But she's only eight."

"Tell me something I don't know." Mione kissed her daughter's head. "It's okay, sweetheart."

Sirius fished inside of his pocket. "Give her this."

Maddie recoiled against her mother, and Mione reassured her. "It's just calming potion. We don't want you to hurt anyone."

"I wouldn't." Maddie immediately protested.

"Not on purpose, we know." Mione uncorked the vial. "But your accidental magic might get out of control, and Daddy isn't here to deal with it."

As he watched Maddie take the potion, Sirius had a question. "How powerful are you and Thomas?"

"I registered at two hundred and sixty-four, and Thomas came in at four hundred and fifty-six." Mione could see that she'd shocked everyone.

Only Buffy was lost. "What's so amazing about that?"

Cammie explained. "A wizard's power is measured by the Magus scale. A Muggle would register at zero; a squib at eighteen or below, an above average Muggleborn usually registers at somewhere between one hundred and eighty and two hundred, and a pureblood at between one hundred and ninety and two hundred and ten. Most wizards come in around the one fifty mark."

Now Buffy understood. "So Thomas and Mione are both off the standard scale then. What are you?"

"I'm nothing special, but because of my affinity for the Dark Arts, I test higher than an above average pureblood would." Cammie then revealed her own testing score. "I hit the scale at two hundred and nineteen; Reg is a little bit higher."

Buffy was curious about the other wizards in the room. "What about the rest of you?" She found out that both Tonks and Hermione were both close to one sixty, and that Sirius came in at two thirty. "So how about Harry Sebastian and the others? Harry has to be somewhere close to Thomas, doesn't he?"

Sirius knew the answer to the question as all employees were measured on a regular basis. "H.J. is the lowest at two hundred and fifteen; then my godson at two hundred and twenty four, and Harry surpasses all of us."

Faith was itching to know how close to Thomas Harry came. "For crying out loud, Sirius. Just tell us for God's sake."

"Three hundred and nineteen." Sirius revealed. "Not nearly as powerful as Thomas but still a serious force to be reckoned with."

"I just hope he makes it back." Mione wondered what had happened to her former husband.

"When I looked at the tapestry, he had no date of death." Sirius had been relieved to see it. "Mione, I need to Legilimize Maddie now, and then I really do have to leave."

The calming potion did its work, and even though Maddie was upset by Sirius' probing, her magic remained reigned in. Sirius withdrew. "She's known since Christmas, Mione. She overheard a conversation between you and Thomas."

"I need to see the memory." Mione kissed Maddie's head again as she reassured her daughter about the process. "Sweetheart, Uncle Sirius will be doing some magic. I'll show you first what happens so that you won't be scared. It doesn't hurt; it just tickles a little."

"I don't want to." Maddie refused.

In the end Maddie had little choice as Sirius easily extracted the first memory of when Thomas had talked to her in the bathroom, which after what had happened with her father, the little girl couldn't help focusing on. One by one, Sirius used what he'd discovered when he'd entered the girl's mind to coax her into thinking of the memory he needed.

Mione rocked her daughter afterwards, who was unable to cry because of the potion, but was clearly distraught that her brains would be the victim of the procedure. Mione glanced at Sirius over her daughter's head. "Do you have what you need?"

"Yes." Sirius would have liked more time but he couldn't go against Mione's wishes. "Now?"

"Now." Mione kissed Maddie's nose. "Look at Sirius for me."

As Maddie turned, she was hit by the obliviation spell. When it was over, Sirius put the girl to sleep. "She's going to be no wiser as to what's happening tomorrow than her brother and sister will be." He pulled another calming potion out of his pocket and took it himself as he could feel the other one wearing off, and he didn't have time at that moment to break down. "Let's see what's in here."

Next Chapter: We find out more about Cammie & Regulus. Maddie's memory gives a vital clue. The state of the Ministry is revealed.

Chapter 74: Revenge Isn't Always a Dish Best Served Cold

10th November 2011

Potter Place - 7p.m.

Mione watched her daughter's memories in silence, tears trickling down her cheeks. After the third memory, Mione couldn't take it anymore. "I'm sorry but I can't watch this." She left the pensieve, turning as she realized that her niece had followed her out. "I'll be alright."

"I don't believe you." Cammie slipped her arm around Mione. "Let's sit down."

Mione sat next to her niece. "I knew what Thomas was capable of when I went back to him, but I didn't think that even he'd sink this low."

"Why did you go back to him?" Cammie now wasn't certain it had been for the reason she'd originally thought.

"Do you remember the night that I found out who Thomas was at Castrum House?" Mione, like Cammie, had no idea of how much the other knew.

"It's hard to forget a masked man holding a wand at your throat." Cammie shivered. "I'm just glad he's dead."

"He's not." Mione then revealed that it had been H.J.

"I'm surprised that you went back to him for Dad's sake, especially after what Dad did to you." Cammie now understood why the offer to leave by the then unknown Death Eater had been made.

"It wasn't just for H.J., but for the others as well. I didn't want Thomas going after them." Mione gave a small smile that had nothing to do with happiness. "I now wonder if I did the right thing."

“Cassandra’s alive because of you.” Cammie reminded her.

“Yes, but what about Harry?” Mione couldn’t hide her concern for her former husband. “He took a hell of a chance today.”

“Uncle Harry decided to stay behind because of Cassandra, and not because of you.” Cammie had thought he’d gone mad, but refrained from saying so, choosing to give her aunt words of encouragement instead. “I’m almost sure he’ll have gotten away; he seems to be able to worm his way out of anything, including death.”

“I can only hope you’re right because I don’t want anyone else to die because I chose to return to Thomas.” Mione saw a small wince cross her niece’s face. “Cammie, is it because you thought I’d gone back to Thomas because I loved him that you didn’t want to see me?”

“Yes. I resented him for literally holding me to ransom, and that resentment spilled over to you when I found out that you’d gone back to him when you didn’t have to.” Cammie didn’t hide her disdain for the man. “However, today Uncle Harry gave me a way out, but it’s also left me like him; without the person I care most about in the entire world.”

“We didn’t see it coming; we all thought you were dating Cedric Diggory.” Mione revealed.

“How could you know that?” Conscious that only the Inner Circle members were privy to that sort of information, a look of shock dawned on Cammie’s face when she realized that there could have been only one person to tell Mione and the others. “Potter isn’t what he seems, is he?”

Mione realized that she’d let the proverbial cat out of the bag. “I can’t tell you.”

“Oaths are just great, aren’t they? I should know; I’ve made more than a few since I left.” As she thought about the pain she’d suffered, Cammie rubbed the Dark Mark on the back of her hand. “Potter gave me this.”

Mione's eyes widened; she'd thought it had been Thomas. "Hurts like hell, doesn't it?"

Cammie had forgotten that Mione had been the recipient of one before. "Oh yes, it certainly does that."

Mione took her niece's hand. "I'm sure Harry will remove it for you once he's returns."

"Have you seen Potter's back?" Cammie pulled her hand away and put it in her lap.

"No, but I know what Thomas did to him, and why." Mione had been upset when she'd found out about Thomas' retribution.

"A few days before he gave me this, Potter told me that his back would serve as a reminder to him never to trust someone like me again." Cammie ran a finger over her Dark Mark. "I'm going to keep this for a similar reason. But I would like the links removed allowing Thomas to kill me or summon me."

"I'm sure they can do that." Mione wasn't so sure that she'd want such a visible reminder of Thomas on her hand.

Cammie paused for a second before moving onto a subject that had been at the forefront of her mind ever since she'd help to rescue Mione. "I hope you don't mind me asking but were you having an affair with Remus?"

"You're asking because of the kiss we shared, aren't you?" Mione guessed correctly.

"Yes." Cammie studied Mione's face. "I wouldn't blame you if you were."

"I wasn't." Even so, Mione still wasn't going to divulge what had happened between her and Remus. "But I meant what you heard me say. I do love him."

“But you're not in love with him, are you?” Cammie couldn't believe that Mione would have moved on so fast from Thomas, even despite his treatment of her.

“No, I'm not.” Mione hadn't been lying when she'd told Remus that she loved him, but her words hadn't held the same connotations his own had. “I love him because he's my best friend, and the only reason I survived in that hellhole and what Thomas did to me.”

“I know it's hard to understand but Reg has done the same for me.” Cammie wondered what he was doing at that moment and if he was alright. “I did see Cedric for a little while but his being married put me off.” She laughed wryly. “I know that Reg is as well, and that what I was doing was morally wrong, but I didn't have many choices as to available partners.”

“Is that the only reason you got together with him?” Mione was as curious to learn about Regulus as Cammie was about her relationship with Remus.

“Let's go for a walk in the conservatory.” Cammie rose to her feet. “And I'll tell you all about it.”

As the two women entered the conservatory, they had no idea that Cassandra was about to be treated to the same story but from Regulus' point of view.

Castrum House - 7.15p.m.

Cassandra winced as the cleaning spell finished its job. “You can go now. It's not as if I'm going anywhere.”

“I told Dominus I'd stay with you.” Regulus explained his presence.

“So what happened today?” Cassandra had been sitting reading when the house had starting rumbling and suddenly she'd found herself covered in glass.

"I can't tell you." Regulus finished healing the myriad of cuts on his niece's face and arms. "That should hold you."

"Thank you, Uncle Regulus." Cassandra saw Regulus start at her words. "Or are you going to deny it?"

"What makes you think I'm Regulus Black?" Regulus had no intention of revealing his identity.

"You want to be a little more careful about who you give out family heirlooms to." Cassandra warned her uncle. "I recognized Grandy Melina's ring."

Aware that the game was up, Regulus removed his mask. "Cam didn't mention that you knew."

"That's because I didn't tell her." As she came face to face with her Uncle, Cassandra thought about her father. "Your deception is going to come as a cruel blow to Dad, especially on top of Orion's death."

Regulus' face fell. "I'm sorry about Orion. If I'd been there, I would have done something to help him."

"I find that hard to believe." Cassandra's face was hard. "I didn't see you mounting a rescue on my behalf when Dominus offered me up as a bed warmer for the highest bidder. Why would Orion be any different?"

"Because I'm probably one of the few people who might have been able to persuade Dominus to change his mind. When you were offered up for auction, I asked Dominus to reconsider afterwards but he refused." Regulus had tried to get Thomas to change his mind.

"In which case, I somehow I doubt you'd have made any difference at Hogwarts." Cassandra challenged Regulus' declaration. "And I think you should leave now, as this is the one night in the month that I'm assured of having some time to myself."

Regulus didn't move. "Does Potter treat you okay?"

"If you mean does he beat me, no, he doesn't; well at least not now, he doesn't. So the answer to your question would be yes, Potter treats me okay." Cassandra met her Uncle's eyes, and reinforced her supposed treatment at Harry's hands. "But if you mean does he fuck me every night he can, yes he does. Then the answer to your question would be no, he doesn't treat me so well."

Regulus flinched at Cassandra's crudity. "I'm sorry."

"Not sorry enough to help me leave." Cassandra again looked pointedly at the door. "Something I'd like you to do."

"Let me repair the windows." Regulus got up and turned his wand on the windows and repaired the glass. "And then I'll go see if I can find out what's happened to your husband, but I will be coming back."

"My husband?" Cassandra's throat felt as if it had closed up. "That was Harry I heard fighting?"

"Yes." Regulus vanished the wineglass that Cassandra had broken when she dropped it as the windows exploded. "He was able to stand up to Dominus before he changed and disappeared into the night. But there are men out there looking for him."

Cassandra sat down, her legs shaking. "Why are you telling me this? Is it so that you can gloat if he dies?"

"No, I'm doing it because I'm in the same position you are now." Regulus thought about Cammie. "The woman I love is out of my reach, and there's nothing I can do about it."

Regulus' comment refocused Cassandra's attention. "Out of your reach?"

"She was taken by, I believe, a colleague of your husband's." Regulus' face showed how angry he was about it. "But I have every intention of getting her back."

"Why?" Cassandra questioned Regulus' statement. "What you've been doing is wrong; Cammie is little more than a child. I'm sure that

there are plenty of other women, women closer to your age, who would be a little more suitable for you."

"Cam's twenty-one, Cassandra, and she's a young woman with a mind of her own." Regulus defended his actions. "So unless falling in love is a crime, I've done nothing wrong."

"I thought..." Cassandra's voice trailed off as she almost revealed that she'd believed Cammie to be dating Cedric, which would have given Harry away. "It doesn't matter what I thought. It doesn't change the fact that you're more than twice her age."

"Age is only a number, Cassandra." Regulus then reminded Cassandra of her own relationship. "Something you should be familiar with as we both know that Harry isn't the young man he appears to be."

"Dominus told you, didn't he?" Cassandra knew that there was no other way Regulus could have found out.

"It doesn't matter how I know." Regulus poured himself a scotch. "Would you like a drink?"

"Why not?" Cassandra walked over to the drinks tray. "But I'll get my own."

Regulus sat down and waited for Cassandra to join him. "Cassandra, because I can do nothing to alter the situation you're in, and given what's happened to Orion, I'm going to give you a friendly piece of advice. After tonight you're going to have to be very careful around Dominus."

"Thanks so much for the warning but perhaps you'd care to tell me exactly why." Locked in her room, Cassandra had no idea what had happened; she'd just been able to hear a scream, then footsteps, shouting and the sound of fighting.

Regulus continued. "It's because your husband and his friend helped two prisoners to escape; two prisoners who had wronged Dominus in the worst way possible. But that wasn't all they did. They took Cam,

and someone else close to Dominus; someone he cares more about in the world than anyone else."

Cassandra hid her relief when she worked out that the two prisoners had to have been Mione and Remus. She did, however, wonder who else had been taken, but she correctly assumed that even if she asked, Regulus wouldn't tell her. "So I gather that Dominus is pretty pissed right now."

"He is beyond that; he's gone to the Ministry." Regulus had never seen Thomas so angry except for when he'd brought Remus and Mione in after he'd discovered them together. "And he's taken Potter and Greyback with him."

"Oh Merlin." Cassandra was horrified. "He's taking advantage because he knows Harry isn't there, isn't he?"

"This wasn't supposed to happen yet." Regulus revealed. "But given Harry's interference, Thomas brought it forward as a way of hitting back for what Harry did."

"So revenge isn't always a dish best served cold, is it?" Cassandra's voice was hollow as she thought about how many people would still be at the Ministry at the time when everything had grown quiet around her. "And now I could lose my father and my husband, as well as my brother."

"Maybe, but Sirius has been leaving early most nights to get home to Faith now that she's pregnant again." Regulus confirmed what Harry Potter had already told Cassandra about Sirius cutting back on his hours as much as he could. "And if he wasn't there when Dominus attacked the building, then Sirius wouldn't have been able to get in without a Dark Mark."

"I just hope you're right." Cassandra twisted her wedding band which hadn't turned black, so she had some reassurance about Harry still being alive, but none about Sirius.

She needn't have worried though, as Sirius was in fact, at that moment, just arriving at BritAD's emergency headquarters.

BritAD Emergency HQ - 7.25pm

Sirius waved down the salute Jupiter Calico gave him. "Stand down, Calico. How bad is it?"

"The attack happened when a shift change was occurring." Calico had just stepped into the fireplace to leave the building as a gold-masked man appeared. He'd been whisked away before he could get out of the fireplace. When he'd tried to return, he'd been unable to gain access. "Whatever Dominus is doing, he's sealed the building, and no-one can get in."

That news didn't come as a surprise to Sirius. "Do we have a casualty list yet?"

"Yes, Sir." Calico handed a copy of the list over to Sirius.

Sirius scanned it quickly. "You can remove Auror Sebastian and his brother from the list of missing as well as Unspeakables Bravo and Fox; they're all out on missions this evening for me."

Calico scribbled out the four names. "That still leaves thirty-three Aurors; ten Unspeakables; thirty-four Ministry employees, and the Minister, unaccounted for. And there was a session of the entire Wizengamot going on, so that's another fifty-four people."

Sirius continued looking down the lists. "Dammit, Alasdair, what were you doing there?"

Calico was able to tell him. "I saw him just before I left, Sir. He said that he was going to stay late to write up the reviews on the trainees."

A job that Sirius was supposed to have been doing the day before, but he'd eschewed it to return home to see Faith. "Thank you, Calico. I want you to call in all Aurors; even those currently on duty. The only ones I don't expect to arrive are the four I've mentioned to you; they're out of contact."

"Yes, Sir. All of them, Sir?" It had never been done before, and Calico double-checked that he'd understood Sirius correctly.

"Yes, Calico, all of them." Sirius started walking away. "Assemble them in Building 7." Reaching his office, he looked around its familiar facade. "I wonder who managed this." He had no idea that it had been one brave Auror who had managed to lock down the major offices on the floor sending them hurtling across the country via portkey to their new location, before the Auror had had to face Thomas himself. As he started to work his way through the list of the missing more thoroughly, Sirius wondered what Harry was doing.

Castrum House - 7.25 p.m.

Regulus returned as he promised, and told Cassandra that Harry was still safe as no-one had managed to find him yet. Cassandra questioned Regulus' reasons for revealing the information. "Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I don't feel good about what happened to Orion, and because you'll no doubt hear about it tomorrow anyway." Regulus decided to be even more open with his niece. "Look, I'll be blunt with you. If things don't go well at the Ministry, and Dominus is angry when he gets back and he decides to take things out on you for what Harry has done, as this time there will be no Cam to step in and save you, despite what you think of me, I am your only chance of surviving."

Cassandra decided that he had no reason to lie. "Well, when you put it like that, perhaps I should stop asking you to leave and ask you to stay instead."

"So what would you like to talk about?" Regulus glanced at the book Cassandra had been reading. "That's a good book."

Cassandra didn't want to discuss King Lear. "I'd actually like to know how you managed to end up with Cammie, and why you gave her Grandy's ring."

"I gave Cam Grandy Melina's ring because I'm in love with her, and if I could marry her, then I would." Regulus could see that Cassandra was interested in what he had to say, and he began to tell her about his relationship. "I became friends with Cam after I taught her how to master the killing curse. On that day I decided to foster a friendship with her for less than altruistic reasons. But it was only after I pissed her off when she found out that I'd lied to her about the price of a dress..."

Cassandra interrupted him. "The price of a dress?"

Taking care to change any references from 'Thomas' to 'Dominus', Regulus explained what had happened, and how Cammie had reacted. "It was on that night that we became true friends. We were just friends for quite some time until..."

11th September 2008

Cammie turned, a smile on her face at the sound of the crack. "Regulus. I was expecting Ced."

"Thomas decided that the other apprentices aren't doing very well, so he's putting them through their paces." Regulus explained. "So I said I'd let you know that Diggory can't make it, and to give you this from him."

Reaching out, Cammie took the long slim box, and tore off the paper. "It's the holster I wanted."

"I also have something for you." Regulus reached inside his pocket and pulled out a small box, which he tapped with his wand to enlarge it. "Happy Birthday."

Cammie found herself being presented with what looked like a dress box. "Please tell me you didn't buy me another dress, Regulus."

"I didn't." Regulus had refrained from buying dresses ever since Cammie had blown-up at him. "Go ahead and open it."

Placing the box on the table, Cammie opened the lid to find a cloak similar to one she'd admired that Narcissa Malfoy had been wearing. "You were listening, weren't you?"

"You gasped loud enough for the entirety of Castrum House to hear you." Regulus remarked. "If you don't like the emerald green, they also stock it in black, and silver, so I can get it changed for you."

"This color will be perfect with my hair." Cammie kissed Regulus' cheek. "Thank you so much."

"You may as well put it on. I'm taking you to dinner." Regulus had told Thomas he'd do it.

"Give me a minute." Cammie nipped into her bedroom, and tidied up her hair, before returning. "I'm ready."

When they got back to Castrum House after dinner, Cammie sat down on the sofa in Regulus' rooms. "I think I'm going to regret that extra glass of champagne I had."

"Let me get you a sobering potion." Regulus headed off to his bathroom, before returning with a vial of the requisite substance. "And I'll get one of the house-elves to fetch you some tea."

Cammie swallowed the potion, shuddering as the effect of the alcohol wore off. "Thanks."

Tea had just arrived when a knock sounded on the door, and once he and Cammie had replaced their masks, Regulus went to open it. "Come in."

After Cedric had entered and closed the door behind him, all three individuals removed their masks, Cedric smiling apologetically at Cammie. "Sorry about this evening."

"It's okay. Regulus took me out to dinner." Cammie got up and kissed Cedric's cheek. "Thanks for my birthday present. It was exactly what I wanted."

"Glad you liked it." Cedric turned to Regulus. "Thank you for taking care of Cammie, Sir, but I hope you don't mind if I drag her away now." Cedric held out his hand to Cammie.

"I'm about to have some tea with Regulus." Cammie indicated the teapot and cups.

"You can have a cup of tea at your apartment." Cedric wanted to be alone with Cammie. "I'd like to spend a little time with you."

"Then you can see me tomorrow." Cammie wasn't going to be rude to Regulus by walking out with Cedric, especially as Regulus had just taken her to dinner.

Cedric scowled. "I'm taking Cho to see her parents tomorrow."

"Then I'll spend some time with you when you get back." Cammie wasn't about to bow to Cedric's wishes.

"You're welcome to join us for some tea." Regulus offered, trying to defuse the situation.

"I'm not that fond of tea." Cedric made it quite clear what he'd been after, when he replaced his mask. "I'll see you on Wednesday then."

"Have a nice trip with your wife." Cammie couldn't resist making the remark, Cedric's highhandedness irritating her.

"Goodnight." His face terse behind his mask, Cedric nodded politely at Regulus and left the room.

Regulus had found the intercourse between the two quite enlightening. "I didn't mean to tread on any toes, Cammie. You could have gone with him. I wouldn't have minded."

"I would." Cammie poured out the tea. "Ced has left me high and dry on more than one occasion, including leaving me sitting alone in a restaurant when he saw Cho with Potter, so it will do him good to be on the receiving end for once."

"Does it bother you that Potter is sleeping with Diggory's wife?" Like Cedric, Regulus wasn't exactly fond of tea himself, and he instead poured himself a glass of red wine.

"It's been two years since we split up, so no." Cammie had been disturbed the first time she'd heard about Harry sleeping with someone else, but now she tried not to think about it. "Anyway, I don't want to talk about him on my birthday."

The two chatted about the changes that Thomas was going to implement in the Death Eater ranks as the evening wore on, before the subject moved on, as it quite often did, to Cammie's family. "You must really miss them at times like this."

Cammie did, dreadfully. "I haven't seen Sevvie since he was a month old. And Dad wouldn't let Mum see me when I was being held at Potter Place." She smiled tightly at Regulus. "Not surprising really, seeing as he believed that I willingly let him suffer."

Regulus could see he'd upset her. "I shouldn't have brought that up."

Cammie got to her feet. "It's alright. I think I'd better head home."

Spotting the tears in Cammie's eyes, Regulus also got to his feet and pulled Cammie against him, patting her back as he usually did when he comforted her. "I was insensitive, and I'm sorry."

A few tears escaped and rolled down Cammie's cheeks before she pulled herself together. "And I'm oversensitive, and I'm sure you must be sick of me crying all over you."

"I've had worse." Regulus let go of Cammie. "Don't rush off. Would you like a nightcap?"

"I'll take a small Baileys if you have some." Cammie hoped he had.

Regulus had begun to stock the creamy liqueur when Cammie had said she liked it. "Ice?"

"Please." Cammie took the glass from him. "So if I'm not being nosey, when have you had someone who's worse than me crying over you? I can't imagine Petra or Virginie being the crying types."

"They're not." Regulus confirmed Cammie's assumption. "But I've upset a few women in my time."

"That's because you're a player, Regulus." Cammie threw his reputation in his face. "And you don't treat women like you should."

"Except for you." Regulus sat down beside Cammie.

"That's only because of who my Uncle is." Cammie expected Regulus to confirm her comment.

Regulus didn't. "Actually, I treat you so well because you're my friend, and I like and respect you, and not because of Thomas. I find most women vacuous, and after a short time I end up bored. You're probably the only woman I don't feel like that about."

"That's because you're not sleeping with me." Cammie observed, as she continued on the subject of Regulus' hedonistic lifestyle. "Doesn't hopping from bed to bed get lonely? I know your marriage isn't ideal, but don't you ever want to settle down with one woman?"

"Yes, it does get lonely, but to settle down with one woman, she's going to have to be someone very special to hold my interest." Regulus studied Cammie's face trying to gauge her response to his comment to his next statement. "And good looking, of course."

"Of course." Cammie mocked Regulus. "Do you know how vain you sound?"

"That's because I am vain." Regulus couldn't resist teasing Cammie. "Be honest with me. If you had the choice of waking up with someone who's attractive or someone who's not, which one would you pick?"

"I'd pick the person whom I respect and like." Cammie answered seriously, before scowling at Regulus. "You'd pick the good looking option, even if she was boring and you didn't like her, wouldn't you?"

"Of course I would." Regulus did it all the time.

"Regulus, you're a pig." Cammie's words, however, were teasing rather than censorious. "Remind me never to sleep with you."

Regulus continued with his banter. "You'd enjoy it."

Cammie recognized his teasing for what it was. "As I said, you're vain, and you're the last person I've ever sleep with." Cammie put down her empty glass. "Thanks for the nightcap."

"You're welcome." Regulus walked Cammie to the door. "Goodnight, Cammie."

"Goodnight." Cammie kissed Regulus' cheek, slipped on her mask and left.

Present Time

Cassandra interrupted Regulus' recitation. "You already liked her then, didn't you?"

"I did." Regulus admitted.

"Was she seeing Cedric Diggory in a romantic sense?" Cassandra had been a little surprised when Regulus had revealed Cedric's real identity. "And why did you reveal his identity to me?"

"She was sort of seeing him." Regulus studied Cassandra. "And I presumed that as you obviously know that Potter's a Death Eater and that he was sleeping with Cho, it wouldn't exactly be a shock to learn about Diggory, as I suspect you already knew."

Cassandra accepted Regulus' explanation. "You're right. I had figured it out."

Regulus got up and refilled his glass and Cassandra's. "So, do you want to hear more?"

"I do." Cassandra confirmed as she took her refilled glass from her Uncle.

31st October 2008

Cammie glanced up from reviewing the various listings that Regulus had asked her to look at with him. "Don't you already have a house?"

"No, it belongs to the Black estate and my wife lives in it, and I'm fed up with spending most of my time in these rooms when I'm not at work." Regulus retorted. "Now, are you going to tell me which one you like?"

"Regulus, my opinion is hardly relevant." Cammie had a favorite though.

"Just tell me which one you like." Regulus demanded.

"This one." Cammie handed over the details for a six-bedroom house that had a large garden.

Cammie had chosen the same one that Regulus had liked himself. "So what appeals to you about it?"

Cammie reeled off the reasons why she favored it. "It's got plenty of room for guests; the master bedroom is huge; the kitchen is fantastic." She broke off to punch Regulus' arm when he pulled a face. "So I don't cook but with a kitchen like that I would learn. And lastly it isn't overlooked and the grounds are spectacular."

"Do you want to come with me to look at it?" Regulus had booked an appointment already for that evening. "I'm seeing it at seven tonight."

Cammie was wholly enthusiastic about the idea. "I'd love to."

After agreeing to meet later, the two parted ways.

Present Time

Cassandra again broke into the dialogue. "Did you buy the house for you or for Cammie?"

"You're very astute." Regulus had no way of knowing that Cassandra already knew the answer. "I initially decided to buy the house for me. I didn't realize then that I'd already fallen for Cam. I should have known because I wanted her to like the house. She helped me to finish decorating it, but it was still some time after that when I signed the house over to her, and gave her Grandy Melina's ring."

"So do you live there with her now?" Cassandra didn't know the answer this time.

"Yes, but I still have my rooms here." Regulus rarely used them though except for keeping up appearances. "But Cam handed back her apartment to Dominus."

"Dominus bought her an apartment?" Cassandra queried the comment. "That's quite an expenditure for someone like him to make on a lowly Death Eater."

Regulus' face tightened. "Cam is not a lowly Death Eater; you know as well as I do that she's a member of the Inner Circle."

"I know." Cassandra could see that she'd managed to upset her Uncle, and she decided to upset him a little more. "I have to be honest though, I found it rather odd that Dominus eventually elevated such a young girl to the Inner Circle."

Regulus knew then what Cassandra was doing, and didn't rise to the bait. "It's hardly a big deal. Cam is rather gifted when it comes to the Dark Arts, and Dominus became fond of her when he held her the first time."

"So fond of her that he bought her an apartment?" Cassandra's voice was mocking. "Are you sure he wasn't sleeping with her first?"

"I'm not surprised you jumped to that conclusion, but I can assure you it's not the case." Regulus knew that only too well. "As you're about to find out."

3rd January 2009

Cammie entered the kitchen and frowned. "Regulus, I've just realized something. This house isn't in a magical area, is it?"

"You spotted the electrical appliances, didn't you?" Regulus was au fait with such things now that he'd become a part of Thomas' world. "I would never have imagined buying a house in a Muggle area but it's far enough away for me to forget they exist."

"Regulus, that's not nice." Cammie opened the fridge. "Did you know that there's champagne in here?"

"As I put it in there, yes." Regulus opened a cupboard and removed two glasses. "I think we should have a drink to celebrate the remodeling of my new home."

After Regulus had poured her a glass of champagne, Cammie let him lead her around the house, showing off the changes he'd already had put in place. "So do you still like the house?"

"I do, especially as most of this is what I suggested." Cammie remarked as she fingered a towel in the master bathroom.

"You've got good taste, so I listened." Regulus took her hand, and led her through the master suite. "Come and look at the view from the verandah. While it's not quite the view that Thomas is blessed with, it's still wonderful."

The two of them headed outside, Cammie sitting down in one of the chairs that graced the raised deck. They then spent the next few

hours talking, and it was just starting to get dark when Cammie sighed regretfully. "I wish I could stay out here all night."

"Why don't you?" Regulus asked, only half-joking.

"Yeah, right. The heating spells would fade, and I'd freeze to death before morning arrived." Cammie believed he wasn't being serious, and leant over to kiss Regulus' cheek as they both got to their feet. "Anyway, I'd better make a move back to Castrum House. I'm staying over there tonight, as Ced is meeting me there at six a.m. for breakfast before he leaves on vacation."

As she leant towards him and the light from the outdoor lamps fell directly onto Cammie's face, Regulus could see the tiny brown flecks that marred the pure green of her eyes, and instead of saying goodnight, he remarked on her eyes. "I've never noticed before that your eyes aren't entirely green."

Cammie found herself staring into Regulus' brown eyes as he held her chin steady, and made a quirky remark. "Neither are yours."

Regulus stuck out his tongue, and released his hold. "Very funny."

"You walked straight into that one." Cammie picked up her mask from the table. "Now I really had better be going."

"Goodnight then." Regulus kissed Cammie on the cheek.

Cammie reached up to plant the kiss that Regulus' remarks had forestalled, her hand resting lightly on his arm. Things changed between them in that instant, as instead of kissing Regulus' cheek as she'd intended to, Cammie instead covered his lips with her own. The kiss had barely begun when Cammie panicked, and she let go of Regulus' arm. "I'm so sorry. I don't know what came over me."

Realizing that she was about to flee, Regulus grabbed her wrist to stop her from leaving. "Cammie, it's okay."

"No, it's not." In a panic, Cammie tried to tug free. "Regulus, let go of me."

"First tell me why you did it." Regulus demanded.

"I don't know." Cammie couldn't look at him.

Regulus knew evasion when he saw it. "Are you refusing to look at me because you feel uncomfortable, or because you're not being truthful?"

"It doesn't matter." Cammie avoided the question. "I'm sorry that I embarrassed you."

"You didn't in the slightest." Regulus had been the recipient of far too many kisses to feel embarrassed by Cammie's brief touch. "And you're not going anywhere until you answer the question about why you kissed me."

"I don't know." Cammie repeated her earlier words.

"Liar." Regulus let Cammie know he was aware that she wasn't being honest with him. "You're still not leaving until you tell me."

"Regulus, this is ridiculous. Just let me go." Cammie didn't look at Regulus as she tried to tug her hand free.

"Not until you tell me the truth." Regulus pressed.

Aware that he wouldn't let go of her until she'd answered him honestly, Cammie mumbled out the truth. "I was curious to see what it would be like."

"Why were you curious?" Regulus had a feeling that there was more to it than just curiosity.

Cammie decided to try going with a flip comment. "You keep telling me how wonderful you are, so I decided to see if it was true."

"If you were anyone else, I might have believed you." Regulus had known Cammie far too long for her to try and blindside him. "So you may as well come clean."

Looking anywhere except for at him, Cammie mumbled something Regulus didn't catch, and he chided her. "You might want to speak a little slower, and more clearly."

Cammie scowled at him, and lifted her head, her voice angry as she dealt with her embarrassment. "Alright, I'll tell you. I kissed you because I like you. I have for a long time."

"See, that wasn't so hard, was it?" Regulus reached for the mask in Cammie's hand, and tugged it away.

Cammie frowned when Regulus threw it back onto the table. "I told you the truth, so you can let me go now."

"Not until I've done this." Cammie found herself being pulled into Regulus' arms as he took possession of her mouth, demanding and receiving a response. As Cammie's arms went around Regulus' neck, and she pressed herself impatiently against him, a tiny whimper escaping her, Regulus ended the kiss, and let go of Cammie. "It's now my turn to apologize. I shouldn't have done that."

Cammie's lips felt swollen, and she resisted the temptation to touch them. "So why did you do it?"

"Because I like you. I have for a long time." Regulus copied Cammie's words.

Cammie believed he was mocking her. "That's not funny, Regulus."

"It's not meant to be." As he made the comment, Regulus was aware that he was playing with fire in the worst possible way. "But as much as I'd like to kiss you again, I think it's best if you go now." Regulus' declaration, however, held no real conviction.

Her stomach flopping over, Cammie picked up her mask, and stood in front of him. "Well, goodnight then."

"Goodnight." Regulus waited for Cammie to replace her mask, and when she didn't, he wrapped his fingers around her wrist once more, and pulled her towards him. "If you don't go, you know what's going to happen, don't you?"

Cammie's heart leapt into her mouth. "Yes."

"Perhaps I should caution you that you don't want to sleep with me." Regulus reminded Cammie of her words of a few months previously.

"At least I know you'd respect me in the morning." To hide her uncertainty, Cammie found herself making an offhand remark. "Or would you be chewing off your own arm to get away?"

Regulus' lips twitched as he entwined his fingers in Cammie's hair. "Your skin is like alabaster, you have the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen, and your hair is like red silk. I think that qualifies you as more than attractive, so I'd have to say no to the whole arm chewing scenario."

As Regulus twirled her hair in his fingers, Cammie made a confession. "I don't normally do this sort of thing, Regulus, and I have no idea what to say or do next."

Regulus made it easier for her. "Cammie, you don't have to do or say anything. All I want is an answer to a question."

"What question?" Cammie couldn't help but ask.

Regulus looked into Cammie's eyes. "Do you want to stay?"

Cammie's heart was now clattering away like rain against a tin roof. "Yes."

Despite Cammie's affirmative answer, Regulus could see that she almost looked afraid. "You say you want to stay but something is wrong. So what is it?"

"I've only ever slept with Potter, and it was just the once." Cammie admitted to her limited sexual experience.

Present Time

Cassandra interrupted yet again. "She only slept with him once?"

"Yes." Regulus confirmed Cassandra's question. "That's how I know she wasn't sleeping with Dominus."

"Okay, I believe you." Cassandra already knew that Cammie hadn't. "And I think we can skip the next part."

"I agree." Regulus had no intention of sharing what had happened with him and Cammie with his niece.

Neither Regulus nor Cassandra had any idea that Cammie, however, wasn't being quite so reticent.

Potter Place - 8.30p.m.

"Mione! Cammie!" A delighted scream rent the air.

The two women turned to see a very pregnant Luna waddling up to them as fast as she could. Cammie found her hands being taken by Luna. "You're pregnant."

"Just a little." Luna kissed Cammie's cheek. "It's so good to see you."

"Where's Xander?" Cammie noted his absence.

"He's still in San Francisco with Matt." Luna could see she'd disappointed Cammie.

"When I saw you, I hoped that they'd be with you." Cammie confessed, excited to see a friendly face. "And while I do know that you moved and you had Matthew, I didn't know you were pregnant again, or what it's like where you're living or anything really."

Luna quickly filled Cammie in on what had happened to her since they'd last seen each other, touching only briefly on the key points. "...and we've got a really nice place that we're renting at the moment on Bush Street, and Matt attends a wonderful Muggle nursery that this one will also be going to."

Unlike everyone else, Cammie didn't express any sympathy that Luna was going to have yet another baby who would be a squib. "Both of your children being squibs must have taken some of the pressure off Xander."

"It has." Luna thought Cammie showed more insight than most people had. "While Xander wouldn't have wished either baby to be non-magical, I think he feels less threatened by them because of it." She took Cammie's hand. "Do you want to feel?"

"Yes." Cammie's face took on a look of awe as she felt the baby kicking. "That's amazing. It's hard to believe that I'm going to go experience this."

"You're pregnant?" Luna hadn't heard about Cammie and Regulus.

"Yes." Cammie continued to keep her hand against Luna's stomach as the baby kicked again. "It's a boy, and I only found out today."

"Someone will have to fill me in. The message we received was that Remus and Mione were safe, and that you were home." Luna took Cammie's hand. "When I heard you were back, I came because I had to see you to tell you that I always knew that you never betrayed us."

"How could you be so sure?" Cammie became choked-up at Luna's heartfelt statement.

Luna could see how distressed Cammie was. "Because I believed in you, Cammie. I always believed in you, as did Xander and Hermione."

Cammie burst into tears. "Up until today, I thought that everyone hated me."

"Oh sweetie." Luna patted Cammie's hand, unable to hug her with such a huge belly.

Mione gathered Cammie to her. "Thomas has a lot to answer for."

Luna glanced at her friend. "He has. And what about you, Mione? How are you?"

"Sit down." Mione then told Luna exactly what had happened from when she was taken up until they were rescued; only omitting making love with Remus. "What happened to us was my fault for going back to Thomas, and not listening to Remus."

Cammie by now had recovered, and she disagreed vehemently with her aunt. "No, it was not. If it had been, Uncle Harry wouldn't have come after you."

"Yes, he would. He'd have done it for Remus." Mione got to her feet. "And speaking of Harry, I want to check the tapestry."

The three women made their way to the tapestry room, Mione letting out a sigh of relief when she couldn't see a date of death next to his name. For Luna, however, spotting the date next to Orion's name was a horrible shock. She touched the tapestry, tears falling down her cheeks. "How?"

Cammie told her about what had happened at Hogwarts. "He was so very brave, Luna."

"I feel responsible for his death." Mione was of the opinion that Orion had died because of what Thomas believed she'd done.

"But you'd done nothing wrong, Mione." Luna wiped her tears away. "Thomas chose not to believe you; he could have made you swear an oath and he'd have known then."

"I tried but he just saw it as a way of my escaping the death he had planned for me." Mione had offered that option but Thomas had refused. "And I believe that Thomas killed Orion because he was angry and hurt with me."

"You don't know that." Cammie hugged Mione. "Only Thomas knows why he did it."

After wiping her eyes yet again, Luna returned her attention to the tapestry. "So Siri is heir to the Black estate now?"

Cammie verified Luna's question. "Katherine's expecting a second daughter, so yes."

It was then that Luna saw Cammie's own name. "Well. I didn't expect that."

"You thought it was Cedric's baby, I know." Cammie couldn't help but stare at Regulus' name. "But as you can see, I made a very different choice."

Luna, like the others had, finally made the hidden connection between Regulus and Thomas. "He's Amicus, isn't he, Cammie?" Luna loved Cammie but she couldn't help but be dismayed by the girl's choice of lover. "Of all the people you could have gone with, he's the last one I'd ever have expected you to turn to."

"I really didn't have anyone else. I admit that I had Ced but I didn't trust him whereas I'd trust Reg with my life, and vice versa." Cammie tried to explain how she felt.

Mione remembered what Sirius had told them about the battle in Athwart Row. "That's why you saved Amicus after Sirius attacked him in Edinburgh, isn't it, even though it could have cost you your life?"

"Yes." Cammie herself had also been injured, and she'd been terrified that Regulus would die. "Reg is my world, and I'd be lost without him."

Luna could understand that, feeling the same about Xander. "You must love him very much to be able to overlook the fact that he's Amicus."

"To me he's not Amicus. He's simply my best friend, Luna." Cammie gave a rueful smile. "And even though I know that my being with Reg must seem so very wrong and twisted to you, I can't change what's happened, and I wouldn't want to." Cammie placed a hand on her flat stomach. "Especially not now."

"So how on earth did you and he get together?" Regulus was the last person that Luna would have ever put together with Cammie. She'd always still harbored the hope that Cammie would get back together with Harry Potter.

Cammie went over the same ground she'd covered with Mione, up until the point where she'd admitted to Regulus that she'd only ever slept with Harry. "And you can guess the rest from there."

Luna snorted. "I don't want to guess. I want to hear about the juicy bits."

Mione rolled her eyes. "You haven't changed."

"I know; how do you think I ended up pregnant again?" Luna smirked in a very un-Lunlike manner. "So spill."

Cammie gave a smile full of happy memories. "It was probably the most amazing night of my life."

Luna sighed happily as she realized that Cammie was indeed going to spill, and she prompted her to go on. "And..."

So pushing any qualms she might have had aside, Cammie told the two women exactly what had happened.

3rd January 2009

"I've only ever slept with Harry, and it was just the once." Cammie admitted to her limited sexual experience.

Regulus was stunned, especially given Cedric's possessive behavior. "But I thought that you and Diggory were sleeping together."

Cammie shook her head. "While I'll admit that we've done a little more than just kissing, because he's married, I've always found myself holding back, even though Ced would like to have gone further."

Regulus wasn't surprised that Cedric wanted Cammie. "Then, given that I'm also married, I don't want you to feel you have to do this, Cammie."

"It's different with you." Cammie was aware that Regulus' marriage had effectively ended years earlier. "And I want to stay."

"Are you sure about this? You look scared to death." Regulus had never seen Cammie look so frightened before.

Cammie owned up as to why she was afraid. "I'm worried about disappointing you."

Letting go of her hair, Regulus took Cammie's other hand in his. "You won't disappoint me." He then began to walk backwards towards the bedroom, leading Cammie on.

"But I'm not experienced, and I know you are." Cammie followed him even as she protested.

"That doesn't matter. Just trust me, Cammie." Regulus knew he was asking a lot of Cammie, especially as she'd sworn never to trust another man again after Harry had thought the worst of her.

Even though Cammie knew what the man holding her hands was capable of, she also believed him. "I trust you."

The two fell silent as Regulus led Cammie into his bedroom. Feeling how much Cammie was shaking, Regulus decided to take it slowly, and make this first time entirely about her. After taking possession of her mouth again, Regulus turned Cammie around, and began to slowly undress her, kissing his way down her back as he unzipped her dress, before pushing it from her shoulders. Any nerves Cammie was experiencing began to vanish as Regulus smoothed kisses along

Cammie's neck, his hands sliding over her silk clad breasts causing her nipples to harden almost immediately. Wanting to feel her skin against his, Regulus tugged his shirt over his head, before pulling her back against his chest. He then resumed kissing her neck, as his hands began to roam over her creamy body.

Regulus felt Cammie suck in her stomach as his hands moved lower. He knew, however, that it wasn't from vanity. Unlike some of the women he'd slept with, Cammie's stomach was perfectly flat, the exercises Thomas had put her through making it that way. After caressing her stomach, Regulus' hands stole further down, and beyond the silk fabric they encountered. As Cammie arched against his chest, Regulus used his fingertips to open her up to him, the soft warmth he encountered telling him that she was taking pleasure from his attentions.

Cammie couldn't stop the tiny tremors that Regulus was causing her body to emit, and she was grateful for the arm that moved back up her body to support her as the tremors grew stronger until finally she cried out. Regulus held her against his chest, kissing her neck as she shook, before removing her bra and turning her to face him. Regulus then cupped each breast, his mouth teasing the hard, pink nipples in turn, making Cammie moan.

Regulus released her when she did. "Sit down."

Aware of how exposed she'd be, Cammie hesitated, only to have Regulus to place his hands on her waist, and sit her down on the edge of the bed. "Now lie back."

Self-conscious, Cammie nevertheless did as he asked, hiding her face in the bedspread when Regulus bent down and removed the scrap of silk she'd been wearing. After daring to look up again on hearing a rustling sound, Cammie gave a tiny 'eep' and hid her face once more when she saw that Regulus had begun to shed the rest of his clothes as well. Soon he too was naked.

Kneeling down in front of the bed, Regulus smiled to himself at Cammie's embarrassment as she peeked at him again. He had a

feeling that Cammie was about to get even more embarrassed. "Now close your eyes."

He wasn't wrong, as after doing as he'd demanded, Cammie shot upright as she felt Regulus' lips touch the same spot his hand had just been caressing. "What are you doing?"

Regulus knew then that this was something Cammie obviously hadn't experienced with either Harry or Cedric. "Making love to you."

"But..." Cammie's protestations disappeared as Regulus pushed her backwards, and replaced his mouth where it had been before she'd interrupted him. Soon instead of trying to stop him, Cammie gave into the sensations that Regulus was causing, tangling her hand in his hair. "Oh my God."

Regulus could tell from the tiny quivers that he could feel that Cammie wasn't far from reaching her climax again, and he flicked his tongue over the sensitive nub he'd just been caressing with his lips. With a wail, Cammie arched up against him, her shaking even more pronounced than before. Moving swiftly up her body, Regulus sheathed himself inside of Cammie's hot warmth, her muscles continuing to contract around him as he began to move.

Still half-dazed, Cammie didn't resist as Regulus then rolled them over so that Cammie was now lying over him, and he used his hands to pull her into a sitting position, before starting a rhythm which she began to follow. Aware that this was totally new to Cammie, Regulus left his hands on her hips to help her, rather than letting them glide over her body as he would normally when he lay in this position.

Cammie's concentration on what she was doing negated any embarrassment she might have felt at being so exposed, and as Regulus began to increase the pace, she felt the now recognizable ache beginning to build inside of her yet again.

Regulus could feel her tremors as Cammie's head fell back, and she began to moan softly. Only then did he begin to seek out his own release, his hands on Cammie's hips forcing up her and down over him; the slow and steady rhythm becoming quicker and quicker.

Before too long, Cammie flopped forward, the sensations too intense to stay upright, and Regulus wrapped his arms around her back as he found her lips. His strangled shout was lost inside Cammie's mouth as he stiffened and released into her.

As Regulus eased his hold on Cammie, he sank his fingers into her hair, continuing the kiss that he'd started. Finally, he lifted her head, using her hair to pull it back so he could look into her eyes. "I think this is going to be a very long night." He then began to kiss her again.

Castrum House

Unaware of what Cammie had just told Luna and Mione, Cassandra and Regulus' conversation had moved on past the night's events. "Well, we didn't get much sleep, and..."

"Too much information." Cassandra broke in. "Just jump to anything that might be relevant."

"Okay." Regulus began to tell her about from when Cammie had woken up.

3rd January 2009

When Cammie awoke the next morning, she found Regulus wearing a robe and lying on top of the bed, eating a croissant and reading the newspaper. She closed her eyes again as she remembered the previous night, and everything they'd done.

Regulus turned his head at the slight sound. "Good morning."

"Hi." Cammie felt uncomfortable, and it showed.

"Do you want some breakfast?" Regulus pointed to the table that sat at the end of the bed.

"I, err, need the bathroom." Cammie looked round for something to put on, spotting the robe that Regulus had placed on the cupboard

beside her. Reaching out, she pulled it on, taking care not to expose herself, completely unaware of Regulus' amusement.

When she returned, Regulus had folded up the newspaper, and was drinking a glass of orange juice. "As I said, help yourself."

Cammie poured herself a glass of orange juice, and stood drinking it.

Regulus smiled, his amusement growing at Cammie's actions. "You can sit down."

"I'm fine standing up." Cammie then jumped as the fireplace shot to life and a quiet pinging began.

Regulus got up. "I bet that will be Thomas. Probably to see why you aren't in your apartment or at Castrum House."

"He can't see me like this." Cammie felt panicked, and she shot out of sight of the fireplace.

"Take a deep breath." Regulus headed over to the fireplace and touched the panel which allowed the person on the other side to make the connection. "Good morning, Thomas."

"Is Cammie with you? She was supposed to be having breakfast with Cedric." Thomas immediately asked about his niece, confirming Regulus' suspicion.

"I brought her over to see the new house. She's actually having breakfast with me." Regulus answered. "Do you need to speak to her?"

Cammie shook her head frantically in horror, mouthing 'no'.

Thomas didn't. "No, as long as she's alright."

"She's fine." Regulus assured him.

“In that case I’ll see you both on Friday.” Thomas then ended the connection.

Cammie sank down the wall. “Oh my God. Don’t ever do that again to me.”

Regulus gave a wicked grin. “Which part?”

Cammie scowled at him. “You know which part. I thought my heart was going to stop.”

Regulus crouched down in front of her. “Cammie, I’m going to have to tell him about us.”

Cammie’s look of terror returned. “He’ll kill me.”

“I doubt that.” Regulus grabbed her hand and pulled her to her feet. “If anyone is a walking corpse at the moment, it’s me.”

“I don’t want him to kill you either.” Cammie suddenly found herself close to tears.

“He won’t.” Regulus responded confidently. “At least I hope not.”

Cammie pulled away. “He doesn’t have to know.” She put down her orange juice, and began to scoop up her discarded clothes. “It was just a one-night stand, and...”

“Whoa.” Regulus grabbed her by the arm, pulled the clothes away and sat her down so that she was leaning against the headboard. “Do you really think I’ve risked my life, or at least my health, for a one-night stand with you?”

Now that she’d started to calm down, Cammie began to think rationally again. “Regulus, it’s not as if I don’t know the score. I’m eighteen, not stupid.”

“Thank you for reminding me of how young you are.” Regulus remarked tartly. “Something Thomas is no doubt going to shove down my throat when I tell him.”

“I mean it.” Cammie’s alarm began to rise up again at the mention of her Uncle’s name. “He doesn’t have to know. Regulus, you don’t have to make more out of this than there was.”

Regulus wondered if he’d misjudged Cammie. “So that’s all this was to you, a one-night stand?”

“No.” Cammie immediately denied his accusation. “But you can’t deny that this is all it would have been if it hadn’t been me.”

“You’re right.” Regulus took Cammie’s hand. “If it had been someone else it probably would have been a one-night stand but you’re my friend, and I like you too much to do that to you.”

“So what is this then?” Cammie was now a little lost.

“Do we have to label it?” Regulus asked, unsure of how to classify it himself.

“No.” Cammie too opted out of settling on a title for their altered relationship. “But what happens now?”

“I’d like to spend the day with you, and then take you to dinner tonight.” Regulus responded.

“And afterwards?” Cammie wondered whether he expected her to spend the night again.

His words confirmed he did. “Afterwards I’d like to make love to you again.” Regulus wasn’t surprised by the bloom that once again tinted Cammie’s cheeks. “But only if you want to. There’s no pressure to say yes. If you don’t want to, then you can go back to your apartment after dinner, and we’ll still be friends.”

Her shyness returning, Cammie glanced down at her hands. "I'd like to come back here."

Regulus resisted the temptation to take hold of her again, knowing if he did, they'd never leave the bedroom. "In that case, why don't you go home, get showered and dressed and meet me back here in an hour."

Potter Place

As Regulus finished telling his niece about the morning after he and Cammie had made love, Cammie had just finished telling the two women about the night's proceedings. Luna was grinning from ear to ear. "Wow! There's something to be said for experience."

"As I said, it was probably, well then it was, the most amazing night of my life." Cammie gave a secretive smile. "As twee as it sounds, he took me to a place I'd never been before."

"Did he make you miaow like a cat?" Luna asked.

Cammie gave her a strange look. "I beg your pardon?"

"I watched something on Muggle TV where that came up and I just wondered." Luna could see that her question had totally thrown Cammie, and she hurriedly dropped the subject. "So that was the start of it?"

"Yes, and we're still just as happy now." Cammie turned as she heard a noise. "Mum."

Hermione hugged Cammie. "It's about time I got to do this." She then hugged Luna and Mione. "Do you mind if I steal my daughter away? I have someone I want to reintroduce her to."

"Not at all." Luna turned to Mione as Hermione took Cammie off to see her little brother. "Let's go and sit down, and we can catch up properly."

The two had barely just sat down when H.J. came in. "Mione, we have a memory you need to see."

Mione and Luna entered the pensieve, and Mione found herself inside a frozen memory, her husband and daughter standing before a large stone tablet. "I don't recognize the room. This has to be at Castrum House."

Faith pointed to the tablet. "This is the final piece of the puzzle, Mione. He actually told Maddie about how he acquired it."

Mione knelt down and read the one word she recognized on the tablet. "Forever."

"What is?" H.J. came to stand beside her.

"Thomas asked me to help him translate a paper. It turns out now that it was this." Mione explained about her husband's request, and the ancient, dead language on the tablet. "You can bet that Thomas has somehow managed to get it translated, although I'd also be willing to bet that the translator is now as dead as the language."

"That's all we need." Buffy sighed heavily. "When we finally think that there's a chance that we might have discovered something of use, we learn that we haven't. We may as well just hand ourselves over now."

Luna disagreed. "You can't give up hope, Buffy. We'll find a way."

"Mione said it herself." Buffy hated siding with Mione, who because of Remus, she would never like. "The language is seriously ancient; dead in fact, and, if she's right, so is the translator."

"Luna's right, Buffy, about not giving up hope." Mione rose up from her knees, a triumphant smile on her face. "Because since I helped Thomas to discover what language this is, I met someone called Dr. Sororean."

Faith recognized the name. "The old hermit guy who was talking at the last conference? I fell asleep."

"Demonic languages aren't everyone's cup of tea, I know." Mione, however, had drank in every word. "But he's not just an expert in them; he's also an expert in old Muggle and magical languages as well."

Buffy's face lit up. "So he can help us?"

"He's a recluse but I'm sure we can track him down with Remus' help." Mione hoped so, anyway. "It was through Remus that we managed to locate him last time."

Not as stupid as she led everyone to believe she was, Buffy made a relevant comment. "How do you know that Thomas hasn't killed him off as well?"

"Because even we didn't know about Sororean's affinity for ancient Muggle and magical languages." Mione had found out when she and Remus had had dinner with the old gentleman after he'd lectured. "Remus tracked him down for his expertise in demonic languages; it was only through a chance comment that we discovered he knew a great deal more than that."

"Do you think he'll help us?" At the time, having only just given birth, Luna had missed the conference entirely.

"There's only one way to find out." Mione turned Luna's wrist over to check the time. "But for now, let's get out of here. We can't do anything until Remus and the others return in the morning, and you need your sleep."

"I'm not tired." Luna reminded Mione of the time difference. "It's only mid-afternoon in San Francisco. If you're not too tired, I'd like to continue the conversation we had begun earlier."

The two women went off to Mione's room to do so. Buffy, H.J. and Faith were left standing together. "I have to tell the children what's happened. I told Sirius I'd do it."

Before Buffy could say anything, H.J. held out his hand. "I'll come with you."

Without Sirius for support, Faith took H.J.'s hand. "You've had to do this a lot haven't you? Breaking bad news?"

"I've lost count of how many people I've had to tell that Thomas, or Voldemort as he was then, had taken a loved one from them." H.J. apparated all three of them to Potter Place, where Buffy excused herself to be with her own children.

Faith let H.J. pull her into a comforting hug. "It seems so long ago since I first met you. Back then I had no idea of how my life would turn out."

"Would you have changed anything?" H.J. questioned her as he released her to make their way up the staircase.

"I'd be a liar if I said no." Faith admitted. "But I know only too well that you can't turn back the clock. Look at what happens when you do."

"Point taken." H.J. sometimes still wondered if he'd done the right thing initiating the ritual, but when he thought about Hermione and his children, he was aware that he'd have led a much poorer life for not knowing them. They stopped at the door to the nursery, and H.J. slipped his hand back into Faith's. "I'm going to stay with you."

Faith could already feel tears forming. "Thanks, H.J."

"That's what friends are for." H.J. then opened the door.

Next Chapter: A single Auror goes hand to hand with Thomas. The fate of those in the Ministry is revealed.

Chapter 75: An Auror's Tale

BritAD Emergency HQ – 12th November 2011

Sirius blearily rubbed his eyes. He'd barely even had time to draw breath since he'd spoken to all of the Aurors and Unspeakables, and explained what was going to happen if the casualty list proved to be correct. He'd then worked with Jupiter Calico to reassign the entire division in order to cope with the losses they anticipated. He refused to let himself think about Orion; conscious that if he did, he'd break down and grind to a halt. A tentative tap at the door disturbed him. "Come in."

"Healer Delaney has requested that you head out to St. Mungo's, Sir." Having been on duty since 6am the previous day, Calico was as tired as his boss, but like him, he too had dosed himself up with pepper-up and carried on.

"Take over for me." Sirius indicated the paperwork. "I'm making lists of families I need to notify about what's happened if it comes down to the worst. Please continue with it, and I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Yes, Sir." Calico resignedly sat down, and began to laboriously search the family books that had been acquired from storage for relatives of those who were currently listed as missing; the original sources for such information still locked inside the Ministry.

Sirius apparated directly outside of Craig's office, and found his door open. "Craig, do you have good news for me?"

"I'm sorry, but I don't." Craig walked over and closed the door. "There was just one Auror who survived."

Sirius' calming potion had long worn off, and he struggled to hold back his tears as he tried to deal with the knowledge that, like him, other parents would be learning in the morning that they too had lost one or more of their offspring to Thomas. "So much for my hopes."

Craig could see that Sirius was trying hard not to cry, and he waved his wand over him to check his vitals, before going to his cupboard. "You look as if you've had a bad night."

"You could say that." Sirius took the pepper-up, calming and nutritional potions that Craig passed to him. "Craig, he didn't just attack the Ministry yesterday; he also attacked Hogwarts and the Academy. And he's killed Orion."

Craig sank down onto his chair, and now he too fought against tears. "Merlin, Sirius. I am so very sorry. Bella's going to be heartbroken when I tell her. Do you know what happened?"

"Yes, but I can't talk about it right now, Craig. It hurts too much." Sirius had to change the subject if he was to go on. "Who is my survivor, and where is he?"

"It's a she, Lucy Viking, and I have her in isolation." Craig revealed why. "She's been bitten, Sirius, and it wasn't an accident."

"What room is she in?" Sirius got to his feet.

"Iso 6." Craig reached out and stopped his friend from leaving. "I haven't filled in any paperwork yet. What do you want me to put on it?"

"Injured in the line of duty with a possible blood infection." Sirius didn't want Craig to have to compromise his duty to the hospital. "Just don't identify the infection. Tomorrow you can say that she's made a full recovery, and there is no apparent infection after all."

"I'll do that." Craig owed a duty to St. Mungo's but he was also a BritAD healer and owed a further duty to Sirius. "And Sirius?" When Sirius hesitated, Craig gave him a warning. "Don't touch Lucy's arm. If you've got any open cuts, even tiny ones, she could, at the moment carry the infection on to you."

"I'll be careful." Sirius promised and then went on his way.

Iso Room 6

Unable to sleep, Lucy tried to rise to her feet when she saw who'd just walked in. "Sir."

"Don't get up." Sirius hurried to stop her, his eyes falling on the bloody bandage that covered her left arm; her right arm strapped to her chest. "Healer Delaney has told me what happened in brief. Are you feeling up to telling me?"

"Yes, Sir." Lucy's face was pale but determined. "It was Dominus, or should I say, Thomas Seville, Sir."

"Seville?" Sirius questioned Lucy's use of Dominus' real name.

"He told me who he was." Lucy explained how she knew. "He seemed to enjoy telling me; almost as much as he enjoyed watching his dogs of his rip through those people in the Ministry."

Sirius imagined that while he felt bad about Orion, his godson had to be going through hell, all in the name of maintaining his cover. "Why didn't he use magic?"

Lucy answered in more detail. "Seville set up a nullifying spell he was controlling. Without magic, most people had no way to defend themselves. The Aurors we came across tried but it was all for nothing; Seville made sure of that. But most people didn't even try fighting; they were too afraid to try."

"But you obviously did something to escape the same fate." Sirius noticed the bruising on Lucy's face. "Did he do that to you?"

Lucy touched her lip that felt ten times its usual size. Craig had told her that even though in future she'd heal much quicker now than a normal witch would, the pathogens in her blood from the bite were making all of her wounds impossible to heal until her own body chemistry accepted the changes. "He did it when I told a group of civilians to defend themselves. Healer Delaney told you about this, didn't he?"

Sirius nodded as Lucy lifted her bandaged arm. "I'm aware of how unfeeling this sounds, but that's the least of our problems right now. I want to know why you alone from BritAD survived, and no-one else did."

"I didn't join him if you're worried about that." Lucy grimaced. "But he offered. He said that I'd impressed him and he liked me."

"I think you'd better start at the beginning." Sirius sat down in the chair next to Lucy's bed. "And if you need to stop, then we can."

Lucy tried to start but her throat closed up as she thought about what she'd have to tell her commanding officer. "Do you have a pensieve, Sir? It would be easier for you to see what happened, rather than for me to explain."

"I'll be right back." Sirius apparated out to the office where his things had appeared out of nowhere. Telling Calico that he'd better change the names of those missing to killed in action, he collected his pensieve and returned to the hospital with it and placed it on the bed. He then extracted the memories Lucy had pushed to the front of her mind, before carefully taking her hand and sucking them both into the pensieve.

BritAD 6.05pm, previous night

Sitting in Cassandra's old office, Lucy continued the paperwork that she'd offered to stay late and help Harry with, having taken over Cassandra's spot after she'd been abducted by Thomas. Suddenly an alarm began to ring; an alarm that Lucy recognized as a priority one, and she rushed out into the corridor, intending to leave to answer its call. Before she did so, she swiftly placed her hand against a panel inset into the wall. "Lockdown Lucy Viking Beta Tango Abalienato." Screens slammed down over all three offices, and Lucy felt a slight tremor go through the building as the offices themselves vanished from inside the structure.

After checking her wands, Lucy then began to run along the corridor towards the stairs, only to grind to a halt as a familiar gold-masked man, and two, what appeared to be, werewolves, entered the corridor.

Aware that he had a dead or alive warrant against him, Lucy aimed her wand at Thomas, even though she knew it would be an empty gesture as he'd probably kill her first. "Avada Kedavra." Nothing happened, and she now understood why he hadn't bothered defending himself. "Oh crap."

Thomas laughed at her efforts. "I've just nullified the magic, Auror."

Lucy was relieved that she'd managed to initiate the lockdown on the offices before Thomas had prevented her from doing so; otherwise the offices would have been locked down via the Muggle screens that Harry had suggested as an extra precaution, but they wouldn't have disappeared. Knowing she couldn't take on Thomas and two werewolves without magic, she turned and ran into the open office to the left of her to try to find something to arm herself with. Not finding anything useful, she was about to pick up a chair when she heard a growl.

Spinning around she saw the larger of the two werewolves standing in the doorway. Keeping her wits about her, she grabbed the pot of hot coffee that was always kept full and hurled its contents into the werewolf's face as it leapt at her. As the hot coffee hit its mark, the werewolf screamed out in pain, and Lucy ducked by it, picking up the chair she'd originally gone to grab.

When Thomas walked into the room, with the smaller werewolf at his side, Lucy was using the chair to smash into the werewolf which, temporarily blinded and in agony, was actually having trouble defending itself. Thomas pulled out his wand and fired a Reducto spell at the ceiling. Both Lucy and Greyback went still as bits of the ceiling rained down on them. "As you can see, Auror, the nullifying spell affects everyone except for the caster."

"I already knew that." Lucy didn't lower the chair, conscious though, that it would be a futile effort to attack Thomas with it.

Thomas snapped out a command. "Greyback, come here." Still unable to see properly, the werewolf followed Thomas' voice and returned to lie by him, whimpering in pain.

Lucy stood her ground, unwilling to release her hold on the chair, and she nodded towards the smaller of the two werewolves. "I'm happy to do the same to that one as well, and you, if you'd like."

Thomas laughed. "You are one spirited young woman. It's Lucy, isn't it?"

"How do you know who I am?" Lucy didn't see how she had managed to come to Dominus' attention.

Thomas removed his mask. "You're the only American here, and also because I know it was you who rescued Sebastian from beneath Azkaban Island after I thought Lily had killed him."

Lucy had almost dropped the chair in shock, before deciding it had to be some sort of trick. "I know you can't be Thomas Seville. Who are you really?"

"I am Thomas Seville. Great disguise, isn't it? Who'd ever suspect a philanthropic billionaire of being the bad guy?" Thomas mocked her. "Think about it, Lucy. How do you think I fund everything? Even with magic, money doesn't exactly grow on trees."

Lucy was absolutely stunned as she let his words filter into her brain, and then, as she realized he was telling the truth, she became furiously angry. "You son of a bitch." Lucy hurled the chair at him.

Thomas vanished it before it reached him. "You've certainly got guts."

"Perhaps you'd like a closer view of your own." Lucy bent down and pulled out her knife from the side of her boot, wishing she'd thought about it when Greyback had attacked her, but she'd had little time to act and had relied wholly on instinct. "So how about it, or are you going to hide behind your wand?"

Thomas would normally have been offended at the insinuation that Lucy had made that he was a coward, but he found her attitude refreshing rather than offensive. "I really do like you, Lucy. And I'm in the mood for a little sport after the day I've had." Thomas removed his cloak. "So I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to offer you a

chance to live, and I'm even going to give you a fighting chance as I'm not going to arm myself. If you can force me to yield, then I'll let you go free and unharmed. If I force you to yield, then you'll be taking a message back to Sebastian for me in whatever form I decide. Agreed?"

"Agreed." Lucy had no other choice, and she just hoped that Harry's hand to hand training would pay off. She eyed the werewolves. "What about them?"

Thomas stepped out of the office, and aimed his wand at the door at the far end of the corridor, opening it. "Scour the rest of this floor. Kill everyone you find. I'll join you when I've dealt with our little spittfire here."

Lucy gasped in horror. "If they've got no magic, they can't defend themselves."

"I'm well aware of that." Thomas beckoned to her. "We haven't got all night. Come and get me."

Harry had taught Lucy well, and she feigned a direct attack with the knife, catching Thomas offguard as she broke it off at the last moment, and dropped to the floor. A look of surprise shot across Thomas' face as his legs disappeared from under him as Lucy kicked out at the back of his knees. And a grunt escaped him as his head hit the ground hard.

Not one to sit back on her laurels, Lucy continued moving, and rolled up onto her knees. She then brought the knife down, aiming for Thomas' chest. Dazed from the blow to his head, Thomas still had the presence of mind to raise up his arm, the knife driving into it until it was buried to the hilt, making him cry out.

Realizing that she'd lose the knife and her only form of defense if Thomas pulled his arm away, Lucy quickly withdrew it, another cry of pain coming from Thomas as the blade retraced its steps.

With his head clearing, as he saw the blade coming down again, Thomas rolled out of the way, and using his own feet, kicked out at

Lucy, who avoided them. She then also rolled away, and regained her footing. She was more than a little astounded when Thomas flipped up from his back and onto his feet so that he was facing her again. "You're fitter than you look."

"Just like Sebastian, I train every day." Thomas began to circle with Lucy, waiting for her to make her next move. "So what are you going to do next, little spitfire?"

Lucy began to slash the air as she moved forward, and Thomas missed her wrist as he tried to grab it, but managed to seize the blade of the knife instead. As Lucy pulled it out of his grasp, slicing his palm, Thomas was already reaching out to take hold of her other wrist with his uninjured hand. Lucy spotted what he was doing but it was too late to stop him, and she found herself being somehow twisted around until her arm was bent up her back.

"Drop the knife." Thomas demanded. "Or I will break your arm."

Not wanting to give in to him, Lucy didn't do as Thomas had ordered, and she screamed as he did exactly as he'd warned her he would. The knife slipped from her fingers as pain reverberated throughout her body.

Thomas, however, didn't release his hold on her broken arm, and pushed it a little higher, extracting a tortured cry of pain from Lucy. "Do you yield?"

"Go to hell." Lucy didn't give up, and pulling her uninjured arm forward, drove it backwards towards Thomas in a last ditch effort to escape.

Thomas easily avoided the elbow that had headed his way, and he pulled her arm even higher, eliciting even more screams. "Yield, or I'll hurt you even more."

Unable to stand the pain, Lucy bit out the words. "I yield."

Thomas immediately released her arm, picked up his cloak, and replaced his mask. "You fought well, little spitfire. Now walk."

Cradling her broken arm, and shaking, Lucy headed out of the office, stumbling as her injury sent pain lancing through her arm. "Where are we going?"

Thomas started walking away from the screams that were coming from the end of the corridor. "To the next level."

Reaching the top of the staircase, Lucy swayed, her vision blurring as the pain in her arm grew. "I'll fall."

Thomas turned his wand on her. "Curatio Temporalis."

As the field dressing applied itself to her arm, Lucy hissed with pain before it subsided to a background ache. "You couldn't have healed it?"

"Healing isn't my business." Thomas cast the same spell on his own arm and hand, and then flicked his wand at the door to keep it open, before proceeding down the stairs. "Come along. You don't want to be up there alone when Simus and Greyback have finished."

Having little choice, Lucy followed Thomas down the stairs. On entering the next level, she jumped as she felt something warm brush against her. Simus and Greyback had already finished, and realizing who had brushed by her, Lucy ran her hand over her leg, and lifted it up to look at it, discovering that it was covered in red. "Oh Merlin."

"It's only blood." Thomas cleaned it off for her. "Something you're about to see more of."

Lucy was forced to stand and watch as the two werewolves picked off the individuals who'd tried hiding in their offices. She couldn't help but notice the difference in the way they operated. The larger of the two toyed with his victims first, whereas the smaller dark werewolf, applied its powerful jaws to its victim's throat, tearing it out in one foul swoop, before moving on to the next one.

Not wanting to give Thomas the satisfaction of seeing how disturbed she was by what she was witnessing, Lucy fought against her roiling

stomach, and kept telling herself it was all a bad dream. Her detachment was shattered, however, when they reached a room where it was obvious the people in there were civilians, as they had children with them, and Lucy turned to Thomas. "They're not part of BritAD or the Ministry. You can't kill them."

"Yes I can." Thomas intended this to be a severe lesson for Harry's audacity in daring to interfere with his plans. "But I will spare the children."

Lucy couldn't stand by any longer and do nothing, and she screamed at the cowering group. "For goodness sake, band together. You can beat them."

Thomas lashed out, knocking Lucy sideways. "Shut your mouth, or perhaps you'd like to join them."

"You know I wouldn't." Lucy didn't know why but she wasn't frightened of Thomas. However, werewolves frightened her as she knew only too well that they weren't all like Harry Sebastian, and even he had warned her that although a werewolf might have taken Wolfsbane, it didn't make it safe.

"Then I suggest you shut up." Thomas turned to the six white masked Death Eaters who'd joined them. "Take the children."

As the parents struggled in vain to hold onto their children, Thomas held up his hand. "Don't try and take them by force." He then addressed the parents. "No matter what you do, you are all going to die tonight, but your children will be spared the same fate if you let go of them. If you do not, then they will die with you. The choice is yours."

Lucy strove to hold back her tears as every single parent did what a good and loving parent would, and released their children. One young girl refused to go, and had to be separated physically, kicking and screaming for her mother. After the children had been taken away, Lucy tried pleading with Thomas once again. "They've done nothing to you. Don't you have any mercy in you at all?"

"Not anymore; not after what she did." Thomas' voice was hard, and he turned away from Lucy to give orders to the werewolves. "Kill them."

Lucy had to close her eyes as the two werewolves did what they'd been ordered to.

Over the course of the next four hours, on each floor, the same operation was repeated again and again. Finally they headed down to the lowest level of the building, where Thomas knew the Wizengamot had been in session. He unlocked the doors and entered the room. "Gentlemen, I think it's time to end this session of the Wizengamot permanently."

Lucy watched as twelve members of the Wizengamot came to stand by Thomas' side. "They're with you?"

"Obviously." Thomas aimed his wand at the remaining Wizengamot and disarmed every single one of them. "As you may have gathered, I've nullified the magic in this building."

A woman shook her head disbelieving. "That's impossible. No-one is that powerful."

"Dumbledore could do it, couldn't you?" Thomas faced the Minister who was still standing in the center of the room.

"Yes." Albus stared at the man who'd even managed to strip him of his ability to cast spells. "Anyone who registers three hundred or more on the Magus scale could."

"And you do, don't you?" Thomas circled the Minister.

"Three hundred and four." Albus was proud of his power. "Next to you, I'm probably the most powerful wizard alive."

"I'm glad you recognize that I easily outrank you, but I do believe that you'll find there's someone else who does as well." Thomas knew exactly how powerful Harry Sebastian was. "Auror Harry Sebastian to be precise."

Dumbledore snorted. "I'm sure Sirius would have told me if that was true."

"Not if Black didn't want you to know, he wouldn't have." Thomas stopped circling, and he taunted Albus. "You like to believe that you're all knowing and powerful but you're not. I have contacts you can only dream of, and I know things you'd like to, including how powerful Sebastian really is."

"Only two people in BritAD know that." Dumbledore argued. "Sebastian and Sirius."

"And one in USAD." Thomas could see he'd shocked Dumbledore. "You see, Harry was succinctly tested while he was there, and he registered at three hundred and nineteen, over a hundred below myself, but still impressive. A little like my companion here." Thomas beckoned to Lucy. "Come say hello to the Minister, little spitfire."

Lucy walked over to the center of the room. "I'm sorry, Minister. I did try and stop him."

"And you did a damn poor job of it." Dumbledore snapped.

Shocked at his attack on her, Lucy took a step backwards. Thomas, however, didn't. "You really shouldn't have said that, Dumbledore. She deserves a lot more respect than you're giving her." Thomas erected a privacy bubble encompassing just the three of them, and removed his mask. "You see, the little spitfire here almost had me." Thomas lifted up his arm to show the bloody hole where the knife had gone through his shirt. "If I'd been a little slower then she'd have sank her knife into my heart."

Dumbledore could barely believe his ears. "But she's a nobody. A slip of a girl and an American to boot."

"And I'm damned proud of it. For your information, Minister, being a girl and an American doesn't make me any less capable, as Seville has just shown you." Lucy's voice reverberated with disdain, any respect she might have had for Dumbledore disappearing at his

unkind words. "And I have the feeling that while I'm going to be leaving here alive tonight, you're not."

"Well said, little spitfire." Thomas sighed. "It's a pity I can't keep you. It's nice to find someone who isn't afraid of me. Are you sure I can't persuade you to switch sides?"

"Absolutely not." Lucy refused again.

Dumbledore wasn't interested in the interplay between Thomas and Lucy. "What do you intend to do?"

"I'm going to kill you before my men kill the members of the Wizengamot not loyal to me." Thomas smirked at Albus. "Did you really think that the spitfire's words weren't true?"

"But I agreed to help you." Albus blustered.

"You treacherous bastard." Lucy couldn't hold back her anger at the Minister's damning words.

"Now, now, little spitfire." Thomas placed a hand on her shoulder. "He thought he was doing the right thing; well the right thing for him anyway."

"But you're a man and the prophecy..." Albus tried again.

"Was meant for me, not you." Thomas revealed. "I'm the one who had to be wary of the Muggleborn female, not you."

Albus had always believed the prophecy to be for him. "I don't understand."

Thomas recited the prophecy for Lucy's benefit.

'He of the greatest power and knowledge beware

For commeth one of tainted blood and death

For her, his heart he will lay bare

And his love for her will mean his last breath.'

Thomas turned to Lucy. "Lucy, tell me who has the greatest power."

"You do." Lucy answered, never once taking her eyes off Dumbledore. She, however, had a question for Thomas. "But who do you love enough to give up your life for?"

Thomas wasn't exactly surprised by Lucy's question. "A few days ago I would have said that there were only my children and my wife who'd I die for. Now it would just be my children. But my daughters are purebloods and therefore cannot be the female in the prophecy. I believe that in fact it is my wife it's talking about; she is the one of tainted blood and death."

"But she's a pureblood." Lucy pointed out.

"No, she's not; well not originally." Thomas gave Lucy a quick explanation. "I come from a very different world as Dumbledore here knows. It's a world where a timeline was twisted and contorted. In the original timeline my wife was born to two non-magical parents, making her a Muggleborn. Obviously things changed, and she ended up a pureblood, but that isn't her true lineage."

Albus sucked in his breath as Thomas joined the dots for him and Lucy. "So your wife is going to kill you?"

"No, she's not." Thomas responded self-assuredly. "She's already tried on more than occasion, and failed to do so. And there's another problem with the prophecy, isn't there, sweet Lucy?"

"Your wife was kidnapped." Lucy began, only to stop as she realized something. "You said you didn't have any mercy anymore because of her. It was you who took her, wasn't it?"

"You're a clever girl, Lucy." Thomas praised her. "I discovered my wife in the arms of a half-breed; a werewolf. Believe me, after that, there are no circumstances where I would ever give up my life for her; not anymore."

"So you did love her?" Lucy ignored Dumbledore, and pressed Thomas for answers.

"I'm seeking eternity, and I wanted to share it with her, so I'd have to say I loved her with all of my heart and soul." Thomas didn't care if Lucy knew what he was after or how he felt about Mione. "But she destroyed that dream when she fucked Lupin."

Lucy's eyes widened as she hadn't connected Remus' disappearance with his being the werewolf Thomas had just mentioned. "Remus Lupin is a werewolf?"

"Yes, and no, he's not registered, a little like your boss you rescued." Thomas didn't know that Harry had already told her about him. "And sadly it's the fate that's awaiting you."

Lucy paled. "You're going to turn me?"

"No, he is." Thomas pointed to the smaller of the two werewolves. "I'd have let Greyback do it, but after the beating you gave him, I thought it more fitting that you at least bear the infected blood of someone a little more refined."

"You're too kind." Lucy couldn't keep the sarcasm out of her voice, as she tried to mask her fear.

Fear Thomas had spotted when he'd told her what was going to happen. "You're not afraid of me, yet you're afraid of them."

"You can't rip me apart with your bare teeth." Lucy quite rightly stated.

"No, my dear, I could do a lot worse." Thomas remarked wryly. "But I'm not going to go back on my word." He turned to Dumbledore. "So, Dumbledore, are you ready to meet your maker?"

"That's a very Muggle expression." Albus remarked, as he tried to figure a way out of his predicament.

"I live with one foot in the Muggle world." Thomas countered. "And I thought that while it is a Muggle saying, it's entirely appropriate for the moment." Thomas stood behind Lucy, placing his hands on her shoulders. "Now my little spitfire, I have an offer for you."

"I'm still not joining you." Lucy refused yet again.

"It isn't that, but that particular offer will be on the table right up until Simus bites you." Thomas wasn't lying when he said he liked Lucy; he did, very much. "I will spare any two of the Wizengamot you want me to, if you kill the Minister for me."

Lucy span round in shock, forcing Thomas' hands off her shoulders. "You can't be serious. I'm an Auror. I'm charged with defending lives, not taking them."

"Then look at it this way, if you kill the Minister you'll be saving two lives." Thomas replaced his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes. "This is where I get to see what you're really made of, little spitfire."

Lucy had never faced a dilemma like this before, and she wondered what Harry would do. "I need to know something first."

"Ask away." Thomas could feel her trembling under his hands.

"What did he do to help you?" Lucy glanced over her shoulder to look at Dumbledore.

"Where do you think I got the authorized portkeys that enabled my first wave of men to travel to Azkaban Island?" Thomas pointed to Dumbledore. "From him."

Lucy thought about how many colleagues and friends she'd lost that night. "Is it true?"

"I..." Dumbledore almost seemed to shrink under Lucy's interrogation.

"You helped him to destroy Azkaban, didn't you?" Lucy felt a cold wave of fury engulf her as Dumbledore dropped his head, and she

turned back to meet Thomas' gaze. "Spare all of them, and I'll kill him."

"A negotiator as well as a defender." Thomas assessed how many members of the Wizengamot there were. "Five."

"Thirty-five." Lucy countered.

"Ten." Thomas bounced back.

Lucy did as Thomas had and assessed the amount of people in the Wizengamot. "Fifteen."

"There are fifteen women, Lucy." Thomas noted after a few moments.

Lucy believed in the old adage, woman and children first. "You spared the children; now I want you to spare these women."

"Very well." Thomas withdrew both of his wands, turned Lucy around to face Dumbledore, and moved to stand behind her, before placing one of his wands at her neck. "It's not that I don't trust you."

"But you don't trust me, I know." Lucy held up her hand. "Give me a wand."

Dumbledore stared in stark disbelief at Lucy. "You can't do this. You're an Auror, and I'm the Minister."

"A position you have shown a marked lack of respect for, and have no right to." Lucy snarled at him. "Do you know how many people died because of you?"

"I didn't kill them." Dumbledore protested, unnerved by the steely look in Lucy's eyes.

"You may as well have." Lucy lifted the wand. "I don't want to do this; it goes against everything I believe in. But if I have to choose between them, innocents in this matter, and you, who is guilty as sin, then I'm going to choose to save them."

"Any last words, Minister?" Thomas interceded as he removed the nullifying spell on the small area they were standing in. "Locus Restituo Veneficus."

"You can't do this." Albus began to bluster once more.

"Not exactly fitting final words for a Minister." Thomas lowered his mouth to Lucy's ear. "Do it, little spitfire. If you don't, then they all die."

"Merlin forgive me." Lucy met Dumbledore's eyes, and she didn't see the frightened, powerless man who was standing before her; she saw the butcher who'd provided Thomas with the means to kill her friends. Resolute and determined, she pushed as much power as she could through her wand, and uttered two words. "Avada Kedavra."

Dumbledore slumped to the ground, and Lucy's legs gave way, Thomas catching her. "Well done. I didn't expect you to be able to do it."

"I had no choice." Lucy's voice was shaking. "You left me no choice."

"I know but there are some who still wouldn't have had the guts to do it." Thomas took back his wand and replaced his mask. "Don't worry, no-one else will ever have to know you did it." He dropped the privacy bubble. "Take the women to Hogwarts. They are not to be harmed. Place them with the teachers."

The women were shepherded out by a group of white-masked individuals, leaving just the male members of the Wizengamot. Thomas raised his wand into the air, and restored the magical properties in the courtroom. "Restituo Veneficus Aula." He took Lucy's good hand. "Come along; we don't need to stop to see this."

Still in a daze at what she'd just done, Lucy let herself be tugged along, and out of the room. Thomas beckoned to the smaller werewolf. "I have another job for you first, Simus. Greyback, do not harm any of my men."

Lucy watched as the smaller werewolf padded out to join them, before Thomas closed the door on the massacre that had just begun. "He's going to bite me now, isn't he?"

"Change your mind." Thomas urged. "Join me, and I'll find someone else to take the message to Sebastian."

Lucy rolled up her left sleeve. "This isn't for you, by the way. It's for him."

Thomas felt regret that the girl had refused. "Very well. Simus, please bite her. Don't make it fatal."

Lucy closed her eyes, and tried not to cry as she felt the werewolf's jaws close around her arm, but she couldn't stop a moan of pain and fear escaping as those teeth drew blood, infecting her forever. She had no idea that Harry was having to fight against the bloodlust that he was now experiencing, and he did what he had to before quickly padding away back into the room as Thomas flicked open the doors for him, before closing them again. Lucy only looked once she was sure that the werewolf had gone. "What's the message?"

"We have somewhere to go first." Thomas took Lucy's arm, making sure he didn't touch the bloody bite. "I'm afraid that will scar."

"Just give me the message." Lucy demanded.

"We're going to it." Thomas vanished them both.

Castrum House

It was almost one o'clock as Regulus finally finished telling Cassandra about Cammie. "As you might have gathered, Dominus didn't take it too well that I was sleeping with his ward."

"He's rather protective of her, isn't he?" Cassandra remarked.

"I am." Thomas' voice interrupted the pair.

Engrossed in what Regulus had been telling her, Cassandra hadn't heard the door opening behind her. "Dominus."

Thomas removed his mask. "Hello, Cassandra. I have someone to see you."

"Lucy." Cassandra rose to her feet. "You're hurt."

Lucy had expected Cassandra to be kept in the dungeons, and not dressed in what appeared to be a very expensive robe, and sitting chatting to a man she recognized as her Commander's brother. "It's nothing."

Cassandra knew what Lucy was thinking. "Don't let my appearance fool you. I'm just as much as a prisoner here, dressed like this, than anyone you'll encounter in the dungeons."

Thomas nodded. "She's telling the truth, and she's part of the reason you're here." He pointed to the chair. "Sit down, Lucy."

Lucy did as she was told, as Cassandra turned to face Thomas, acting as if she'd only just discovered his true identity. "You really had everyone fooled, didn't you?"

"I can't deny it." Thomas shrugged. "I thought I may as well tell you now, as I have a feeling that your esteemed father and the rest of your merry band of friends know who I am by now, thanks to my wife." Thomas helped himself to a drink. "Reg, I'm sorry but I think your bridges to your brother will also have been burnt."

"I guessed as much." Regulus had had the feeling that Mione knew who he was when she'd been talking to him.

Thomas sat down next to Lucy and passed her a glass of Cognac. "It's good for shock."

"It's perfectly safe." Cassandra reassured her friend as Lucy hesitated to take the glass. "It's what I'm drinking."

Despite what Cassandra had told her, and Thomas' reassurance, Lucy still couldn't believe that Cassandra was a prisoner. "You're no more a prisoner than he is."

Regulus interrupted. "You'll find that my niece is. She's had to earn the privileges that you can see."

Lucy swallowed some of the Cognac. "Earn?"

"Yes, earn." Cassandra bit the words out. "If I play nice, then I get rewarded."

"By whom?" Lucy was starting to cotton onto exactly what Cassandra meant.

"You remember Simus, don't you?" Thomas lifted Lucy's arm. "Then again, as he's only just given you this, I'd say you'd find him a little hard to forget."

"He bit you." Cassandra was horrified at what Harry had done. "I'm so sorry, Lucy."

"Aren't you going to ask how he is?" Thomas baited Cassandra.

"Dead hopefully." Cassandra snapped.

"Sadly for you, no." Thomas let go of Lucy's arm. "Cassandra is Simus' special friend."

Lucy shivered as she finally understood why Cassandra was treated as she was. "I'm sorry, Cassandra."

"Why is she here?" Cassandra questioned Lucy's presence.

"She's not going to be sharing your fate if that's what you're worried about." Thomas took Lucy's empty glass from her, and got up. "She's going to be taking a message to your husband for me."

"What kind of message?" Cassandra was only too well aware that Thomas' messages could often be deadly.

"The verbal kind." Thomas returned the refilled glass to Lucy. "Your husband took something tonight that belonged to me."

"What?" Cassandra asked tentatively.

"My wife, her lover, my niece, and most importantly, my daughter." Thomas leant forward. "Do you think I should take something as important from him?"

"Thomas..." Regulus rose to his feet.

"Sit down, Reg." Thomas didn't take his eyes off Cassandra's face. "I'm not going to hurt her. I don't have to after this evening." He turned to Lucy. "Tell them what I did."

"He killed everyone in the Ministry." Lucy finished off her second glass of Cognac, hoping to lose herself in a blur of alcohol.

"Not quite everyone." Thomas removed the glass, and placed it on the side table. "I spared the children, and fifteen members of the Wizengamot. Do you want to tell them why, Lucy?"

"No." Lucy shook her head, and for the first time that night her face crumpled. "I can't."

"Tell them." Thomas ordered.

"No." Lucy wiped away her tears with her left hand.

"Tell me." Cassandra demanded. "That's an order, Viking."

Lucy lifted her eyes to meet Cassandra's as the sharp tone of a commanding officer sank in, before dropping her head again. "I killed the Minister for him."

"You joined him?" Cassandra immediately jumped to the wrong conclusion.

"No, she didn't." Thomas lifted Lucy's head up. "I gave her a choice. If she killed Dumbledore for me, I told her I would spare two members of the Wizengamot. She negotiated for fifteen; all of the women."

"I had to." Lucy chose to look at Thomas, rather than Cassandra. "Dumbledore was the one who gave him the portkeys to get to Azkaban, and I couldn't let innocents die for nothing."

Cassandra felt as if she'd been sucker punched. "But he's my godfather."

"And a traitor." Thomas reminded her. "He called my little spitfire here a nobody."

"Little spitfire?" Cassandra repeated the name.

"Yes. She has the same fire you have, Cassandra." Thomas eyed Cassandra. "You may act subservient to Simus, but I've seen that spark when you think no-one's looking. He hasn't broken you yet."

"I do as I'm told." Cassandra looked down at her hands. "I couldn't keep going on as I was."

"But acting subservient and being truly deferential are two very different things." Thomas remarked. "I doubt Simus will ever truly break you. You're too much like the little spitfire here. The only difference between the two of you is that she's not afraid of me and you are."

Lucy couldn't believe that Cassandra was. "No, she's not."

"You're very wrong." Thomas got up and walked over to Cassandra and twisted his fingers into her hair. "Isn't she, Cassandra?"

"Yes." Cassandra didn't move. "Lucy, you have no idea what he's capable of; what he's done tonight is just the tip of the ice cube."

"It's iceberg, Cassandra." Lucy automatically corrected the Muggle saying. "What else has he done, Cassandra?"

Cassandra glared at Thomas. "He killed my brother."

"It's true, I did." Thomas didn't show any remorse. "If Potter had done as I'd asked the first time, he'd still be alive."

"But Uncle James begged, didn't he?" Cassandra had to know if what she'd learnt had been the truth.

Before Thomas could respond, Lucy brought up Thomas' comment from the Ministry. "He said he had no mercy left after what Mione did to him."

"Mione?" Cassandra questioned Lucy's use of her name.

"Yes." Thomas let go of Cassandra's hair, knowing he'd unnerved her by touching her. "When I told you that my wife betrayed me, Lucy, I didn't tell you that I was going to execute her and Lupin this evening." Thomas pulled a face. "Actually, that's not entirely true. I was going to have Lupin kill my wife before I executed him."

"But you love Mione." Cassandra responded instead of Lucy, injecting as much shock as she could into her voice.

"I do love her, yes, but she betrayed me." Thomas scowled. "With that half-breed."

Cassandra went to open her mouth to point out that Harry Potter was the same, but taking her cue from the look on Thomas' face, decided that it would be in her best interests to say nothing of the kind, and went with the obvious instead. "They're just friends."

"Reg, fetch my pensieve. You can apparate into my rooms." Thomas ordered. "And don't worry, she'll still be alive when you get back."

Cassandra recoiled as Thomas sat down by her. "I don't believe that Mione would ever do anything like to you. She knows as well as I do what you did to Selina Gregory, or at least were have rumored to."

"Who's Selina Gregory?" Lucy interjected.

"Mack Jameson's wife." Cassandra could see that Lucy was still confused. "It's a very long story."

"Lucy knows I'm not from this world." Thomas climbed to his feet again.

"That was true?" Lucy hadn't exactly believed what she'd heard.

"It is." Cassandra confirmed it. "May I tell her?"

"There's that manufactured subservience again." Thomas let Cassandra know that he was more than aware of her subterfuge. "But go ahead."

"If the rumors are true, Thomas found Selina with her lover, and he killed the lover straightaway before torturing Selina for hours, and afterwards leaving her dismembered body on the steps of the Ministry." Cassandra didn't hide her disgust.

"The rumors were true." Thomas confirmed it to Cassandra as he once had to Mione. "And while I thought it might be a deterrent to my wife, I was wrong."

Regulus appeared again, the pensieve in his hand. "Where do you want me to put it?"

"On the coffee table." Thomas took both Cassandra's and Lucy's hands. "Let's go see how wrong Cassandra is about Mione."

As the memory unfolded inside the pensieve, Cassandra unconsciously tightened her grip on Thomas' hand as she listened to the conversation, believing exactly the same as Thomas had. "I never knew."

"I can tell from the death grip you have on my hand." Thomas flexed his fingers when Cassandra let go. "Now tell me, do you think my wife was, and probably still is, having an affair with the half-breed?"

"But she couldn't have." Cassandra still didn't want to believe that Mione would cheat on Thomas.

"Little spitfire, how about you?" Thomas still had Lucy's hand in his. "What do you think?"

"I think she did." Given the evidence, Lucy couldn't believe anything else. "I don't want to believe it, but it's difficult to discount after what you've just shown me."

Thomas pulled them both out of the pensieve. "Now, Cassandra, tell me. How would you feel if it had been you, and you'd found Harry in that position?"

"Harry wouldn't..." Cassandra began.

"Just answer the question." Thomas didn't want excuses.

"As if I'd died." Cassandra answered honestly. "But I still wouldn't go as far as you intended to."

"I know that, I just needed an honest answer." Thomas didn't reveal why. "Sit down, Lucy; our time together isn't exactly over just yet." He smiled at Regulus. "So what were you and Cassandra discussing?"

"Cam." Regulus' voice became introspective. "And why I couldn't have picked on someone else."

"He loves her, Cassandra." Thomas defended his friend. "Don't you think he's entitled to a little love?"

"He's married to my aunt." Cassandra pointed out. "And after what you've just revealed, I'd have thought that you'd be the last person to condone adultery."

Thomas' jaw tightened, the only sign that Cassandra's barb had hit home. "See, there's that fire again. However, you're right. I don't condone adultery but Reg's marriage is effectively dead, and Cammie makes him happy. And why wouldn't I want to see my best friend and my niece happy? I respect him, and I love Cammie almost as much as I do my own children. Something your husband seems to have forgotten."

"That's what you attacked the Ministry isn't it?" Cassandra questioned Thomas. "Because Harry took your daughter."

"It was for all of Harry's transgressions." Thomas clarified. "But mostly for taking Maddie."

Cassandra was more than a little disturbed to learn that the young girl had been in Castrum House. "May I ask why she was here?"

"She's my heir, Cassandra, and I'm going to introduce her as such." Thomas informed her. "Or at least I will when I get her back."

Cassandra thought that Thomas was fooling himself if he believed that Mione would give Maddie up. "Do you really think that Mione would ever let Maddie or any of her children be drawn into this world?"

Thomas' blood ran cold when Cassandra's words sank in, and he got to his feet. "Excuse me."

All three remaining in the room looked at each other, Lucy asking the obvious question. "Where's he gone?"

"No idea." Cassandra found out as Thomas returned as she finished speaking.

It was obvious that he was far from happy. "Lucy, the time for you to pass that message on has come. Tell Sebastian if he survives tonight, that if he ever comes anywhere near the Ministry, Hogwarts or any of my houses again, I will allow him to witness exactly what happened to Selina Gregory. Only this time his wife will play Selina's part."

Cassandra went white, but she said nothing. Thomas, however, hadn't finished. "And get him to pass a message on to that whore. Tell her I will get my children back, and when I do, I'll make sure that she never sees them again. In fact she won't ever see anything again, because when I get another opportunity to get my hands on her, I won't wait for a full moon. I'll kill her myself." Thomas grasped Lucy's chin firmly. "Did you get that?"

"Yes." Lucy tried not to squirm as Thomas' fingers dug painfully into the injury he'd already inflicted on her. "Is there anything else?"

"No." Thomas released her, and picked up the Cognac glass. "Portus." He also withdrew a ring from his pocket. "Morsmordre. Now I need you to put this on."

"No way. That's a Dark Mark." Lucy quite rightly observed.

"Unless you'd prefer to deliver a visual message to Sebastian, I suggest you do as you're told." Thomas snapped, any joviality now gone.

Not willing to take the chance that he'd carry out his threat, Lucy took the ring and slid it onto her finger. "This doesn't mean I've joined you."

Thomas shook his head in disbelief. "I've just threatened you, and you still have to have the last word, don't you?"

"Did you expect anything different?" Lucy held out her hand. "I take it that's for me?"

"It is." Thomas gave her the glass.

"The activation code would also be good." Lucy by now was in a great deal of pain, and wanted nothing more than to be gone.

Thomas smiled in spite of how angry he was, and took Lucy's right hand making her wince, before kissing her knuckles. "I hope we meet again, little spitfire."

"Forgive me if I don't return the compliment." Lucy still didn't back down, but she wasn't stupid enough to snatch her hand away.

"Au revoir." Thomas let go of her hand, and activated the portkey.

One week later

Lucy lifted her head up as the door to her cell swung open. "What do you want? Haven't you caused me enough trouble already?"

Thomas wasn't surprised at the welcome he received. "What, no hello?"

"Hello?" Lucy snarled at him. "You expect me to greet you like a long lost friend?"

"It was just a suggestion." Thomas stepped further into the cell.

"Well you can shove it where the sun doesn't shine." Lucy hissed. "Because of you I was brought up on a murder charge. It didn't matter that I'd just saved fifteen lives."

"I didn't make you do it." Thomas reminded her.

"You knew I'd do it." Lucy flung the truth in his face. "And now, because I thought I was doing the right thing, my parents have disowned me, I've been stripped of my position, and I'm scheduled to die tomorrow."

"She's absolutely terrified but it isn't of you." A silver-masked individual came to stand by Thomas.

"Why would I be afraid of him?" Lucy tried not to cry. "Tomorrow I'm going to be pushed through an archway into Merlin only knows what, so he's the least of my problems."

Thomas held out his hand. "Come with me."

"No." Lucy refused. "I hate you."

"Stubborn as ever." Thomas sat down on the tiny, lumpy mattress that passed as a bed. "Lucy, it doesn't matter how you feel about me. If you don't come with me, then you will die tomorrow."

"Why are you doing this?" Lucy demanded to know. "You've met me once, and you know how I feel about you and your band of goons."

"I'm doing it because I like you, and you don't deserve this." Thomas rose to his feet. "I'm going to ask once more, and then I'm out of here. Do you want to live, or do you want to die?"

Lucy dropped her head, and let the tears begin to fall. "I don't want to die."

"Simus, get her out of here." Thomas ordered.

Lucy recoiled as she realized who was behind the silver mask. "Get away from me."

"On second thoughts, Lucy, stay behind me." Thomas passed her a wand. "Try to use it on the right people if we run into trouble."

"Don't worry about that." Lucy thought about using it on Thomas but she was more than aware of the man standing to the rear of her.

Five minutes later, Lucy found herself back in Castrum House. "Home, sweet home."

Thomas removed his mask, and laughed at her mocking comment. "Lucy Viking, I'd like you to meet your other rescuer, Harry Potter."

Harry removed his mask. "Miss Viking."

"Potter." Lucy didn't hide her enmity for Harry.

"I'm afraid she doesn't like me very much." Harry remarked.

"You bit her, Potter. What do you expect?" Regulus got up from where he was seated. "I didn't expect to see you again."

"Likewise." Lucy grabbed hold of a table as she began to shake as the enormity of what was happening hit her. "Sorry, I suddenly don't feel so well."

"Harry, tell Rivers to meet me in Lucy's rooms." Thomas slipped his arm around Lucy's waist and apparated them both into a large and feminine bedroom.

Lucy pulled away. "I hope that you don't think..."

"Not at all." Thomas broke into Lucy's sentence. "While I admit that I'm no longer fond of my wife, I have no immediate plans to replace her with you or anyone else."

"Good, because I'm not that grateful." Lucy kept up her prickly attitude.

Thomas smiled. "I didn't think you were." He beckoned to the man who was hovering in the doorway. "Rivers, make sure that Lucy is well-nourished and fit enough to join me for breakfast tomorrow." Thomas pointed to a door. "You'll find whatever you need in there. And that is for you."

Lucy spotted the mask he'd pointed at. "Red?"

"You're my new apprentice, Lucy." Thomas took her hand and kissed her knuckles. "My room, 8am. It's the next floor up, last set of double doors on the right."

After Thomas and Rivers had left, Lucy immediately opened the door Thomas had indicated, to find a closet full of every item of clothing, footwear, and cosmetics that she'd ever need. "I wonder who these belonged to originally?" She had no idea that Thomas had ordered the entire wardrobe especially for her. Going into the bathroom, she couldn't help but be impressed at the opulence she found. "I wouldn't be able to afford this on what the Ministry paid me."

Finally she headed out to the sitting room, to discover not only a small refreshment area that was extremely well stocked, but several bookcases full of a plethora of books for reading as well as spellwork. "Quite the choice." Exhausted by her day, Lucy picked up a book she'd read before, and headed back into her bedroom, only to scream as Thomas popped back into existence in front of her. "Yes?"

"I almost forgot to give you these." Thomas handed over two holsters, each containing a wand. "And this."

A knife exactly the same as the one she'd used on Thomas lay in a leather belt. "How do you know the wands are compatible?"

"I still have your old wand, if they're not." Thomas had sent it to the wandmaker to get the custom ones made.

Lucy waved the wand away from Thomas, quite sure if she tried to kill him, that he'd still manage to stop her. "Lumos." She was surprised at how bright the light was. "Wow."

"There's a big difference between custom made wands and the one you probably bought at Liberty Wandmakers." Thomas mentioned the largest makers of wands in the US.

"There is." Lucy replaced the wand into the holster. "Thank you."

"You're going to need them tomorrow." Thomas stopped at the door. "Are the rooms satisfactory?"

"That's a stupid question." Lucy retorted. "I'd have to sell my soul to afford anything like this out in the real world."

"This is still the real world, Lucy." Thomas inclined his head. "It's just a better one."

Next Chapter: We find out what happened to Harry; A change of power in the wizarding world occurs; Buffy makes a request of Remus.

Chapter 76: Defiance

Lucy felt much better when she woke up the next day, and after showering and dressing, picked up the mask that Thomas had left for her. "I'm not putting you on unless I have to." After finding a pair of trainers to wear, she tied back her hair and let herself out of her rooms.

Thomas called out when he heard a knock. "Come in." He immediately noticed that Lucy wasn't wearing her mask. "You're supposed to be wearing that when you walk around the house. Close the door."

Lucy noted that he'd been wearing his mask, only taking it off once she'd shut the door. "I don't see the point of hiding who I am behind a mask. When are you going to stop hiding behind yours?"

"Not for a while." Thomas beckoned to her. "The dining room is this way."

Lucy discovered that it would just be the two of them, and she threw her mask onto a side chair before sitting down. "Is this where I get a lecture on what I can and can't do?"

"I see you're back to your usual abrasive self." Thomas had gone to pull out her chair, but she beat him to it.

"That's because I feel much better." Lucy began to help herself to breakfast, watching as Thomas did the same. "No coffee?"

"Sorry, I prefer tea." Thomas called out, and a quivering house elf appeared. "Fetch a pot of coffee."

"Make it strong, please." Lucy smiled at the house elf, which hurriedly disappeared. "It seems scared of you."

"Ask me if I care." Thomas buttered his toast.

"Now who's being abrasive?" Lucy bit into a piece of bacon, swallowing it before she spoke again. "So what is it you want to talk to me about?"

"It can wait until after breakfast." Thomas went to pick up his newspaper, only to lay it back down again as Lucy snorted. "Now what?"

"You could have read the paper before breakfast; I thought you invited me here to tell me what you wanted." Lucy smiled as the house elf appeared with her coffee. "Thanks."

Thomas gave up on his paper. "You're going to fight me every step of the way, aren't you?"

"I'm here because I had no choice, but that doesn't mean I'm going to act like Cassandra does." Lucy speared a piece of sausage. "I don't do subservient well."

"So I've noticed." Thomas took a mouthful of his tea, half-wishing it was something stronger, as he had the feeling that he was going to need it before the morning was over. "Right, we'll start off with basic rules. When you walk around the house, wear the mask. If a common Death Eater spots you without it, then he's going to think that you're fair game. The mask identifies you as my apprentice, and provides you with a protection you wouldn't get with a wand."

"Because everyone's scared of crossing you?" Lucy asked, shuddering at the beloved but bitter taste of the hot, strong coffee.

"Exactly." Thomas wrinkled his nose at the smell of the coffee, not particularly liking it that much. "Also I'm going to need you to swear an oath of allegiance to me."

"Saying what?" Lucy wasn't just going to swear her life away.

"Keep my secrets; not to take up arms against me; defend me with your life..." Thomas' words trailed off at the look on Lucy's face. "Everyone has sworn the same, even Reg."

"I'm not everyone." Lucy certainly had no intention of defending Thomas with her life. "I'm happy to swear not to attack you but that's as far as it goes. As for your secrets, I'm not interested in them, so don't bother telling me what they are, and you've got more chance of flying to the moon under your own steam than you have of me defending you."

"Why doesn't that surprise me?" Thomas questioned himself again as to why he'd gone to help Lucy at all. "For the moment you can just swear not to attack me unless I invite you to do so. I don't want to find a knife in my back when I'm not paying attention."

"And don't think I'm taking that Dark Mark, because I'm not." Lucy refused before Thomas could mention it.

"I'm not compromising on that." Thomas wasn't about to let her refuse it.

"Then go ahead and kill me, because I'm not tainting my soul with that abomination." Lucy had seen one on a prisoner's arm, and she'd been disgusted.

"Very well." Thomas withdrew his wand, only to lower it again in exasperation, as Lucy didn't even flinch and she continued to eat breakfast. "You are going to be the death of me."

"One can only hope." Lucy knew that Thomas wouldn't have risked himself to rescue her only to kill her the next day, and so she'd continued eating. "Why does everyone have to have one anyway?"

"You can't apparate in and out of here without one." Thomas explained.

"I could, if you keyed me into the wards by bypassing the protean link." Lucy had a minor in wardbreaking. "So that solves that problem."

"It's also a way of letting you know that you have a meeting." Thomas continued.

"An ordinary protean charm would do the same, and, as I presume that I'm going to be living here, one of your lackies can just walk upstairs to my room and tell me if I'm needed." Lucy countered. "And by the way, I also know that the Mark is a way of killing people. But again though, you won't need it for that. If you want to kill me, all you have to do is pull out your wand. We both know that I couldn't beat you."

"It didn't stop you trying at the Ministry." Thomas reminded Lucy of her attempt.

"Just doing my job." Lucy pulled a face. "At least my former job, anyway." She plastered on a very obviously fake smile. "So what's going to happen today?"

"I was going to begin your training, but once you've finished breakfast, instead I suggest you go for a walk around the house, with your mask on, of course." Thomas' head was beginning to ache.

Lucy grinned at him. "I have the same effect on my roommate."

"I hope she took out shares in headache potions." Thomas rubbed his forehead.

"His name was David, and no, he didn't." Lucy rose to her feet, after topping up her mug of coffee and placing some bacon inside a piece of toast. "Try adding a small infusion of feverfew to the headache potion. It won't change the efficacy of it, but it will clear up your headache faster."

"I'll remember that." Thomas pointed to the mask. "Don't forget that."

Lucy picked it up. "Can I shorten it to drink my coffee?"

"Of course." Thomas watched as she slipped it on and did exactly that. "Meet me back here at 10.30."

"Sure." Lucy grabbed the mug and walked off.

Thomas dropped his head into his hands. "Why the hell didn't I just second guess myself?"

Chewing the last of her sandwich, Lucy bounded down the stairs and out into the gardens, casting a warming spell as the cold air hit her. "Nice what you can afford with a little money." She then left the carefully laid out path and stepped onto the damp grass inhaling the smell of fresh air. After a week in New Azkaban, it was like nectar to her. As she lowered her head, she spotted something shiny in the grass. Her stomach flipped over when she realized that the shiny something was a wedding band and that it was still attached to the remnants of what appeared to be a finger. Kneeling down she looked closer, and recognized the heavy band. "Merlin."

After carefully vanishing the body part, she cleaned the ring, picked it up and slipped it into her pocket. "I wonder what the hell happened here?" Between them, Cammie, H.J. and Harry Sebastian could have told her.

One Week Earlier

Cammie left her rooms, walked down to the dungeons, and hid in the shadows until she could get clear shots at the guards. As they turned away from her hiding place, Cammie hit both of them with sleeping spells, and floated them into a vacant cell. She was about to close and lock the door when Lucius and Rupert entered the corridor. Cammie acted immediately. "Reducto."

Rupert batted the spell away. "Stupefy."

Cammie ducked and easily avoided the spell, before turning her wand on him again and repeating the same spell. "Reducto."

Rupert shielded this time, just as Lucius spotted the guards' bodies. "Stop, both of you."

The authoritative tone had the desired effect, and Cammie and Rupert both hesitated, Cammie questioning Lucius. "Why? I can't let you leave here knowing what I've just done; you'll tell Uncle Thomas."

Lucius had no intention of leaving without what he'd come for. "Did you do this to the guards?"

Cammie had little choice but to admit to it. "Yes."

"Why?" Rupert questioned her.

"Why do you think I did it?" Cammie retorted. "I'm not going to stand by and let Uncle Thomas kill someone else I know."

Rupert pulled off his mask. "It's me, Cammie."

"Dad?" Cammie's voice was hesitant. "What are you doing here, and how did you even get in? This place is under lockdown."

"We're rescuing Mione and Remus, and we got in the same way you got Harry out last time." H.J. informed her.

Cammie glanced at 'Lucius'. "So who's we?"

Harry Sebastian pulled off his mask. "Hi, Cammie."

"Uncle Harry!" Cammie shook her head. "You've both gone mad. If Uncle Thomas finds you here, he'll kill you."

"No more than he'd kill you." Harry replaced his mask. "I'm sorry but we don't have time to chat; we need to get them out."

"How were you planning to do it?" Cammie enquired.

Harry held out spare masks. "Back through the grounds. You?"

Cammie held up masks of her own. She'd intended to apparate both Remus and Mione out one by one, and she decided to stick with the plan. "I have a better idea. With this place under lockdown, I can't apparate out directly from here, but unlike anyone else, I can apparate from the gardens or the apparition point. I'll get them out and then I can return to get you two. But I have to come back afterwards."

H.J. couldn't understand why his daughter was still insisting on remaining. "Cammie, why?"

"Because if I don't, others will pay for the price for it." Cammie told her father. "We'd better get on with it; they haven't got much time." Cammie then placed her hand against a panel that was built into the side of the wall, and pushed her wand into a slot. "You'd never have gotten through the security."

Harry swore under his breath. "Sneaky bastard stole my idea."

"Carus Amicus Ostium Comperium." Cammie gave the password that would open any door to her. Five minutes later, she'd apparated Remus and Mione out, and had returned to rejoin Harry and H.J., with Harry insisting that he was going to get Cassandra.

Everything was going well until suddenly the house rumbled, and glass exploded all around them. Harry quickly grabbed Cammie and swung her around so that his back was to the glass windows. He winced in pain as tiny shards of glass buried themselves in his arms and legs, his basilisk skin vest protecting his back. "What the hell was that?" Knowing that the hallway would be overrun with Death Eaters if he didn't act quickly, Harry released Cammie and flicked his wand at the double doors to the ballroom. "Obfirmo Recedo Harrison Sebastian." As the spell took effect, the doors merged into the wall. Harry's head then shot up as he heard the sound of pounding feet. "Someone's coming from upstairs."

"You have to go." Cammie hissed. "You haven't got time to get to Cassandra."

"Too late." Harry realized that whoever was coming had almost reached them. He was shocked to see that it was Maddie. "Accio Maddie."

Maddie screamed as she flew through the air and into the arms of the silver-masked man. Harry aimed his wand at her quickly calling out a stunning spell, and Maddie went limp.

H.J. heard a man call out Maddie's name, and he grabbed Cammie, putting his wand at her throat. "Sorry but I have a feeling I'm going to need a hostage."

"It's okay, Dad." Cammie knew that Thomas wouldn't kill her but he would H.J.

Still a little dizzy from the knock on his head he'd received when Maddie's magic had gone wild, Thomas stopped running as he spotted the group. "I know you're not Argentus or Logus, so who are you?"

"Does it matter?" Harry made a demand of Thomas. "Back off."

Thomas ignored Harry's order. "Carus, what's going on?"

"Carus was good enough to help us liberate some of your prisoners." Harry revealed Cammie's part in the night's proceedings.

"You should have refused to help them, Carus. And you're going to pay for it." While Thomas wouldn't normally punish his niece, after what had happened, he was furious with her.

"She had little choice in the matter." H.J defended his daughter.

"She had every choice." Thomas argued.

Harry answered before Cammie could say anything. "No, she didn't. If she hadn't helped, then I'd have killed her, and you wouldn't want your niece splattered all over the walls would you?"

Thomas sucked in his breath as he realized that, as had happened before, the Death Eater addressing him knew exactly who he was. "No." He looked at his daughter. "Let Maddie go; she's just a child."

"A child who shouldn't be in a hellhole like this." Harry snapped at him.

"What do you intend to do with them?" Thomas and Regulus both had their wands trained on the group, but neither of them was willing to risk an all out fight with Maddie and Cammie being used as shields.

"Take them with us." Harry informed him. "What else do you expect us to do?"

"You're not taking them anywhere." Thomas took one step closer.

Feeling the pull of the moon, Harry decided that it was now or never if he was going to get the others out. Aware that his chance to rescue his wife was gone, he almost silently whispered a spell that was directed for H.J.'s ears only, and the words tickled H.J.'s ear as the spell reached him. "Answer Thomas, and then do exactly as I tell you."

"I think you'll find that we have the upper hand." H.J. responded to Thomas, as he listened to Harry telling him what he wanted.

Harry kept his voice as quiet as he could, the sound of Thomas and H.J. arguing covering it up. "I'm about to change so when I throw Maddie to you, apparate out with her and Cammie back to the area we came in. Cammie obviously has a Dark Mark so Anna can get you all out. I'll get out via the gardens in the morning."

H.J. readied himself as without further warning, Harry threw Maddie over to him. Knowing they'd all be safe to apparate because of Cammie's Dark Mark, H.J. apparated all three of them to the edge of the wards, leaving Harry alone.

The moment Maddie left his arms, Harry dropped several bags onto the ground, and the air became black as he used the Peruvian instant darkness power he'd brought with him. He grinned as he heard Thomas try to banish it with a spell, believing it to be a darkness spell and not a substance. As Thomas resorted to firing off reducto spells into the darkness at him, Harry, who could barely see himself, used his enhanced senses to head for the door to the gardens. He'd just reached the start of the grass when he doubled up in pain. "Not now."

Thomas apparated outside to escape the darkness, and aimed his wand at the Death Eater who had fallen to his knees. Wanting him alive to torture him, and not kill him, he aimed a non-lethal spell at Harry's leg. "Reducto."

Harry twisted, trying to deal with his transformation and the oncoming spell. Unfortunately it hit his hand, blowing part of it clean away. Unable to turn around to look at Thomas as he fought his own body's changes, Harry screamed out a threefold spell that was aimed at the ground. "Humus Labefactus Promittus." Harry then began to reel off the remaining spells as the first one took effect, and Thomas was thrown off his feet as was Regulus.

As the ground trembled around him, it threw Harry over so that he was now lying on his back as the second part of the threefold spell became effective, and a massively violent thunderstorm erupted overhead.

"Sebastian." The moment Thomas had heard the words 'Tempestas Imber Maximus Ter' he'd known instantly who was behind the mask but had been unable to regain his footing to attack Harry, his head spinning even more now that he'd hit it for a second time that night. Climbing to his feet, Thomas swiftly began to disperse the storm so that he could see properly again.

Just as he ended the storm, a tortured scream reached his ears, but Thomas couldn't locate it's origin as the final spell in the trio surrounded him and he was immersed in a dense, bone-chilling fog. When Thomas finally dispelled the fog, it was to see a werewolf limping off into the trees and disappearing into the night. With darkness upon them, Thomas lost sight of him. "Regulus, find out why no-one else is around."

Regulus found that the hallway was now clear of the powder Harry had used, and he marched over to where the ballroom entrance had been. He tried several spells, each progressively darker than the last but to no avail. He turned as Thomas joined him. "I can't unmerge the doors."

Thomas tried as well. "He's used the same trick he did before. I'll have to remove the entire wall to get in." Thomas apparated outside and aimed his wand at the wall there. "Reducto." A massive hole appeared in the side of the house and Thomas again aimed his wand, this time shoring up the damage he'd caused. He then stepped into

the hole, and dropped the apparition wards on the house. He beckoned to one of the Death Eaters. "Come here and roll up your sleeve."

Frightened the Death Eater did as he was told, kneeling with his arm outstretched. He let out an agonized cry as Thomas placed his wand against the Dark Mark and angrily summoned every single follower he had. Within minutes all those Death Eaters who hadn't previously been told to ignore a summons and to stay at Hogwarts, came flowing through the doors at the far end of the ballroom. With Regulus at his side, Thomas headed over to the dais and addressed Rupert, who'd also joined him. "Take twenty men and head out into the grounds. There's a werewolf out there. I want him alive."

The Death Eaters Rupert chose were obviously uncomfortable at the idea of pursuing a werewolf but had little choice but to follow Rupert outside. Thomas then addressed Lucius. "Go to the Ministry, and seal the doors to the courtroom. I don't want the Wizengamot leaving. Make sure that only I can unlock them. Then wait for me in the foyer."

Lastly, Thomas snapped out orders to his men. "The rest of you will apparate out in groups of five, but not until Amicus tells you to do so."

Thomas then apparated downstairs, returning a few minutes later with Greyback and Harry Potter, who like Harry Sebastian, had both changed into their lupine forms. "Amicus, send the groups in at ten second intervals."

"I will remain here." Regulus decided it would be best if he didn't leave Cassandra unprotected.

Thomas agreed with him, but not for the same reasons. "If Sebastian is found, have him taken to the last room in the dungeons."

"Yes, Dominus." Regulus inclined his head and as soon as Thomas vanished, he began to order each wave of Death Eaters out until eventually the room was empty. He then headed upstairs to check on his niece.

In the gardens, Harry ran as fast as he could away from the house and towards the wards. He knew that he wouldn't be able to get out until morning, but he wanted to be ready. Dropping to the ground when he got there, he whimpered in pain at the damage that Thomas had caused to his hand, which was now a paw that was missing half of its structure. Licking at the wound to stem the bleeding, the microbes in Harry's saliva helped begin the healing. He glanced up when he heard a familiar voice calling his name, and gave a tiny bark. H.J. knelt down. "Anna, can you get him out?"

"Not without his Dark Mark and his help." Able to see as well as Harry could in the dark, Anna spotted Harry's injured paw. "He's been hurt. Don't light up your wand."

H.J. lowered his wand. "Can we heal him through the wards?"

"No." Anna transfigured two stones into comfortable chairs, and cast several warming spells. "It's going to have to wait until morning."

"How bad is it?" In the light of the partially cloud covered moon, H.J. could see little more than Harry's outline.

"He's got half of his left paw missing; looks like a Reducto spell hit him but I can't see any other injuries." Sitting down she called out softly to Harry. "Harry, if you're injured somewhere else whine twice." When no sound came back, she was satisfied that her observations were correct. "We're going to have to stay alert. I'm willing to bet that Seville's men are out looking for him. And Remus is out here somewhere, and whatever was in that potion they gave him, I'm willing to bet that it wasn't just Wolfsbane."

Remus made no appearance, and just over an hour or so later, both H.J.'s and Anna's rings started vibrating. Anna frowned. "H.J., find out what's going on. I'm going to stay with Harry."

H.J. returned after thirty minutes. "Thomas has attacked the Ministry. No-one can get in or out. Temporary H.Q. on Azkaban is in effect."

"How many people were inside?" Anna could see that Harry's ears had gone up as he too listened to what H.J. had to say.

"Over a hundred." H.J. flopped onto the spare chair, wincing, the pain in his leg far worse than usual now that the field dressing had dissipated. "Including the Minister. There was a full meeting of the Wizengamot this evening."

"Shit." Anna said what Harry was thinking. "Was Sirius there?"

H.J. shook his head. "Thankfully not, but Alasdair and several other key Aurors were. It happened during shift change."

"Bastard." Anna got to her feet. "Did Sirius have a message for us?"

"Sit tight with Harry; there's nothing we can do at the moment." H.J. passed Anna a bag. "There's something to eat and drink in there." He apologized to Harry. "Sorry, I can't pass you anything through the wards."

Anna took out a mug that was warm. "I hope this is hot chocolate."

"It is." H.J. also had a mug of his own that would keep refilling. "It looks as though tonight is going to be longer than we thought."

The Next Morning

After a night of dodging Thomas' men, as the moon set, Harry changed back, panting as he struggled against the pain in his hand. "Get me out of here."

Anna ignored the fact that he was naked, and began to work on the wards, making short work of them. "Harry, H.J., you both know what to do."

As Harry was catapulted through the tiny breach onto the other side of the wards, H.J. grabbed him, wrapping a blanket around him. "Instanter Medicus." Both of them vanished.

St. Mungo's

Harry could see that Sirius had had a terrible night. "How bad is it?"

"Thomas now has jurisdiction over Hogwarts, the Academy and the Ministry building." Sirius slumped into a chair. "We lost over a hundred people in the Ministry; sixty slayers and twenty-four watchers at the Academy; and one teacher at Hogwarts."

Harry could smell Sirius' grief as though it were an acrid, cloying scent. "James?"

Sirius shook his head. "Orion."

"Shit." Harry reached out with his uninjured hand and clasped Sirius' shoulder. "I'm really, really sorry."

"It's okay." Sirius managed to get the words out before breaking down, no longer having calming potion in his system.

Climbing off his bed, Harry gathered Sirius against his shoulder with his good arm and rubbed his back. "Let it out."

Sirius couldn't have stopped himself from crying if he wanted to, and he wept against his son-in-law. Harry couldn't stop a few tears of his own from escaping as he felt the raw pain that was coming from Sirius. He said nothing as Sirius purged some of his grief through his tears. Neither man knew how long went by until finally Sirius managed to regain control of himself. "I'm sorry. I just couldn't hold it back any longer."

"Don't apologize." Harry gave him one final hug before letting go. "But I think you should take another calming potion. I've taken a pepper-up, and once Craig gives me the okay, I'll take over from you."

"Harry, you're re-growing your hand." Sirius pointed out. "And you've just undergone a change."

"And I'm strong enough to keep going." Harry argued. "One of us needs to be at the new H.Q., and right now you're exhausted and grieving."

Sirius gave a terse nod. "I'll go home and get a few hours sleep but then I'll be back. Harry, you should know that Dumbledore and all of his staff are dead."

"So you're acting Minister, aren't you?" Harry knew the protocols that were in place in case of such an emergency.

"Yes, and you'll have to take my place at BritAD for the foreseeable future." Sirius confirmed.

"Can you give me a brief rundown on what happened?" Harry asked.

Sirius nodded. "Only one Auror survived the attack, and that was because that bastard had a message for you."

"Which one?" Harry had no idea who'd been inside the Ministry except for Alasdair, and he wondered if it was him who'd survived.

"Lucy Viking." Sirius pointed to the pensieve. "You need to see her memory of what happened."

Harry immersed him in the pensieve before coming out a short time later. "Where is she now?"

"New Azkaban." Sirius informed him. "Her trial is tomorrow."

"Trial?" Harry was stunned. "She saved the lives of fifteen women, and tried to save those civilians."

"The law is the law." Sirius wasn't going to let Harry argue with him. "I want you to prosecute her."

"No." Harry refused. "I'm acting head of BritAD now, and I'm not doing it."

"I've already signed the authorization for the trial, and it's going ahead with or without you." Sirius rubbed his eyes. "She's already freely admitted to killing the Minister, so I have little choice."

Harry hated that he was right. "Fine but find someone else to prosecute her; I won't do it. And I want the strongest objection to this action noted on file."

"Very well." Sirius changed the subject. "Calico went home at four a.m. but he'll be back on duty at nine. He's been acting as my right-hand man all night, so he can fill you in on everything you need to know. I'm going to go home but I'll be back by noon."

"I'll see you then." Harry was more than a little disturbed as Sirius left, and he got up, intending to look for Craig so that he could be released.

Grimmauld Square

Anna lowered Remus to the chair. "Take it easy. Hermione?"

It was Mione who came running into the hallway at Anna's call. "Thank goodness. Where's Harry and H.J.?"

"St. Mungo's. Don't worry, it's just a minor injury on Harry's part, and some pain in H.J.'s leg on his." Anna glanced around. "Where is everyone?"

"Cammie and Hermione are sleeping; they were still up talking when I came down at four to get something to drink. Tonks and Buffy are in their rooms with their children." Mione's own children had still been asleep with Luna on a bed in her room when she'd checked on them. When she'd heard Anna's voice, she'd been on her way downstairs, having gotten a room ready for Remus and if he needed one, Harry. "We'd better get him upstairs."

Remus groaned as Anna lifted him up. "I can walk."

"You can barely keep your eyes open." Anna dismissed his statement. "Show me where to put him."

Mione led the way to a bedroom. "I've already ran a bath, but he'll obviously need assistance to get in."

Too weak to help them, Remus was lowered in with the blanket that Anna had wrapped around him still covering him, before Mione increased the bubbles in the bath and vanished the blanket. "I'll stay with him. I don't want him drowning."

"I'm going to arrange for Craig to come and see him." Anna was alarmed at how weak Remus was and the fact that he was still in pain.

Mione sat on the edge of the tub. "Do you want me to wash your hair?"

"I can do it." Remus, however, couldn't even lift his arm.

"Just lie there." Mione set up a spell so that Remus wouldn't sink below the water and filled the sink with clean water before wetting his hair and shampooing it.

Remus groaned as Mione massaged his head. "After four days that feels good."

"I felt the same way." Mione rinsed his hair with the fresh water, before repeating the same steps and finally applying conditioner, and then rinsing it out. "Let me help you sit up."

Mione had to use a spell to allow Remus to remain upright, and picking up a sponge and the soap, she began to wash his back. "Sorry, but you're obviously not up to this."

"Mione, I can feel your embarrassment." Remus said gently. "You don't have to do this."

"Remus, you can't do it, and I'm here." Mione moved around to his chest, her face burning.

"Do you want to talk about what happened?" Remus asked, when after soaping his chest, Mione rinsed him off and lowered him back down.

"Not right now." Mione began to wash his arms. "This water is getting really dirty."

"I haven't showered in four days, so that's not entirely surprising." Remus glanced over to the doorway as he heard a noise. "Buffy."

Mione shot to her feet, her embarrassment more apparent than ever. "He's, err, rather weak, and dirty, and couldn't do it himself."

"I can do it." Buffy offered. "Unlike you, it wouldn't be the first time that I've seen him naked."

Mione had thought her face couldn't get any hotter, but she was wrong. "Then I'll leave you two alone."

Remus could feel Buffy's annoyance. "She was just trying to help."

"She looked uncomfortable." Buffy lifted Remus' leg out of the water and began to scrub at it. "So I take it that I was right in saying that she's never seen you naked?"

"She hasn't." Remus didn't reveal though what had happened between him and Mione. "Are the girls okay?"

"They're still sleeping." Buffy picked up his other leg and cleaned it off. "That bastard really made a mess of you, didn't he?"

Remus' body was far from healed, and the cuts, burns and bruising stood out in stark contrast against his pale skin. "He thought I was having an affair with his wife, so yes."

"Well, we both know that's not true, seeing as you've just told me that she hasn't seen you naked, and judging by how fast she ran out of here." Buffy's hand disappeared beneath the water, making Remus jump. "Remus, it's not as if we haven't done this before."

Remus willed his body not to react to Buffy's touch as she used her hand to wash him. "Buffy, that was a while ago."

"Someone had to do it, and I'm willing to bet that Mione wouldn't have." Buffy removed her hand, pulled out the plug, and grabbed a towel. "You're going to need help to get out and get dry, aren't you?"

"I could actually do with a shower to wash off the dirty bathwater first." As the water drained away, Remus found himself being wrapped in a towel, and lifted as though he weighed nothing and carried towards the shower. "Press the top button. James had the same system installed here as Sirius has in his house when Cammie was staying in this room."

Buffy lowered Remus into the shower cubicle and pulled off his towel. "Sorry but I'm not getting this shirt wet, so you'll have to sit there."

"Still worried about how you look then?" Remus sniped, and then apologized. "Sorry."

"It's okay." Buffy pressed the button.

Remus sighed as hot water flooded over him. "Medium hot."

"No magic Latin words?" Buffy had expected something like that.

"Not in here." Remus closed his eyes, trying to fight sleep off.

Buffy pressed the button again after a few minutes, and was pleased to see the water shut off. "See, I'm not as stupid as you think I am."

"Buffy, I've never said that you were stupid." Remus was wrapped in a fresh towel, and Buffy carried him into the bedroom and dropped him onto the bed.

"Sorry, I'm just feeling a little oversensitive and tired at the moment." As Buffy dried him off, she talked. "I've never been so frightened and worried than when Sirius came and told me what had happened to you."

"Sirius told you?" Remus knew that the two of them still disliked each other, no matter what he and Faith had done to try and persuade them to get along.

"Yeah, after he'd told Nicole." Buffy began to rub Remus' hair. "Harry went to tell Thomas."

"So how did Harry find out that it was Thomas who took us?" Remus was rolled over and Buffy began to dry his back.

Buffy explained about Harry's fresh interrogation. "He then came back here, told H.J. that he was going after the two of you, and to say goodbye in case he didn't make it back. H.J., of course went with him. Even though I know you were rescued by Cammie and the others, I don't exactly know what happened to you after you changed."

Remus couldn't tell her either. "Thomas told me I was being given Wolfsbane. Obviously there was something else in it because the last thing I remember before I woke up to find Anna standing over me, was collapsing during the change last night."

"Craig should be here soon." Buffy helped Remus into some pajamas and into the bed. "There, all nice and clean."

A few minutes later, Craig came into the room, yawning. "Sorry but I haven't had much sleep."

Remus thought he looked awful. "You look like shit."

"So do you." Craig returned the compliment. "Let's take a look at you."

Remus lay quietly as Craig examined him. "So what's wrong with me?"

"You've been poisoned." Craig delved into his medical bag. "A suspended form of silver nitrate that's slowly leaking into your system." He pulled out a potion. "This is an emetic, but it won't make you vomit. Instead it draws poison out through the skin, so I'm afraid the next few hours are going to be far from pleasant. I'm going to have to go back to the hospital as I need a potion to give you as well, and it's not something I carry around."

"Have you seen Harry?" Remus swallowed the potion that Craig had given to him.

"I released him just before I came here so that he could take over for Sirius." Craig felt a pang of grief as he thought about Orion and his friend.

Remus sensed it. "Is Sirius alright?"

Craig shook his head. "Seville killed Orion."

Remus felt as though he'd been punched. "I'm fucking going to kill him."

Buffy took Remus' hand. "I'm sorry, Remus."

"I'll be back as soon as I can." Craig left the two of them alone.

Remus couldn't stop his tears. "I took care of him as a baby when Sirius couldn't cope with the death of his wife. He was my godson."

"I know, Remus." Buffy climbed onto the bed and pulled Remus close to her. "I know."

Remus tried hard to control himself. "You'll ruin that blouse. The toxins from my skin will damage it."

"It doesn't matter." Buffy stroked Remus' hair. "You're more important than a piece of clothing."

Mione opened the door to find Remus being comforted by Buffy, and saying nothing, she closed the door and went back out again.

20th November 2011

Remus groaned. "Head hurts."

"Here." Mione helped him to sit up. "Take it nice and slowly."

Remus opened his eyes fully. "So the potion worked?"

"Not exactly." Mione wiped his face as she'd been doing at regular intervals when it was her turn to sit by his bedside. "Buffy came

running out screaming a few minutes after I went in to see how you were. You were having some sort of seizure because of the toxins inside of you."

"But Craig gave me an emetic." Remus gratefully accepted the glass of water Mione offered him.

"Which actually made things worse." Mione plumped his pillows and tidied his blankets as she talked. "The nitrate released into your system but instead of being extracted through your skin, it became concentrated in your stomach and bloodstream instead. Thomas is brilliant with potions, and this was, without doubt, his handiwork. Craig spent twelve hours trying to keep you alive while the potion I'd brewed did its job."

Remus smiled. "Thomas isn't the only brilliant potions master then, is he?"

"Luckily for you." Mione didn't think that she'd ever been so focused before in her life as she'd worked to get the tricky potion ready.

"What time is it?" Remus noticed the lamps burning by the fire.

"About two o'clock in the morning. Buffy usually takes over from me at six, Hermione at twelve and Tonks at six." Mione listed the main caregivers who'd helped to take care of Remus. "Luna was also here for a while but she returned back to San Francisco a few days ago. You've got her to thank for saving your life. While the rest of us were panicking, she came flying into the room, realized what was happening, and induced vomiting which ejected some of the toxins from your body."

"I'll send her some transcripts on ancient and mythological creatures." Remus knew that Luna would appreciate that more than flowers. Remus rubbed his head, glad to find that he could now move under his own steam. "How long was I out?"

"A week." Mione could see how stunned he was by the length of time. "It's a double-edge sword; if you hadn't been a werewolf then the potion couldn't have done this, but if you'd been human, your body

wouldn't have survived the stress. Either way it still sent you into a coma while your body repaired the damage that had been done."

"What's happened during that time?" Remus sat up as his stomach rumbled.

"Let me call a house elf." Mione did so, and Remus put in an order for some food, feeling absolutely ravenous.

Mione told him what had happened with the Academy and Hogwarts. "I'm really sorry, Remus. I've been running things from here as best I can but with the children, taking care of you and everything else, I'm afraid that for once in my life, I've had to put work on the back burner."

"I'll be able to take back over now." Remus was grateful to see the house elf return with a plate loaded down with everything he'd asked for. "Help yourself."

Mione poured herself a cup of tea and had several slices of toast as she continued to tell him about the events of the week. "Orion's body was returned the day after Thomas attacked the Ministry, and his funeral was a few days' ago."

"How is Sirius doing?" Remus didn't know how he'd cope if he'd lost one of his children.

"Not good but he's got little choice except to push on." Mione had seen little of either Sirius or Harry though, as both men were being stretched from pillar to post. "There's a lot of unrest after Dumbledore's death, and..."

"Dumbledore's dead?" Remus wondered exactly what else he'd missed.

"Lucy Viking, the American Auror, killed him for Thomas." Mione went into more detail about what Lucy had done and Sirius' decision to prosecute her. "Her trial was a few days ago, and she was sentenced to die yesterday."

"The fucking idiot." Remus was as angry as Harry had been. "He's made Lucy a scapegoat for his anger at Thomas. Didn't Harry do anything?"

"He tried but Sirius is the acting Minister now that Dumbledore is dead, and Harry couldn't override his decision." Mione had been horrified. "However, she's not dead. She disappeared from her prison cell yesterday morning."

"Thomas?" Remus queried.

"We presume so." Mione had been surprised when she'd heard of Lucy's close shave. "I've seen the memory of what happened at the Ministry, and Thomas likes her, Remus; he likes her a lot to be truthful."

"Does it bother you?" Remus could feel mixed emotions coming from Mione.

"A little." Mione answered him truthfully. "But it's more of a knee-jerk effect I think."

"Can I see the memory?" Remus continued eating as he asked.

"Harry has it." Mione put down her mug. "It's interesting viewing. Lucy almost killed him, and Thomas lapped it up. He asked her to join him several times but she turned him down, even when she was about to be turned."

"Turned?" Remus felt as though he was operating with missing pieces.

"She was bitten by Harry Potter so that she could give a message to Harry." Mione informed him. "Which is what makes her rescue even more incredible. We both know how Thomas feels about werewolves."

"How do you know he liked her?" Remus questioned Mione, trying to make sense out of what he'd learnt.

"He told her he did, and he called her 'little spitfire' and 'sweet Lucy'." Despite how Thomas had treated her, Mione still felt hurt. "But we're getting off topic."

Remus put down his fork and took her hand. "Mione, even given what he did to you, things like this will be hard to bear for a while."

A tear trickled down Mione's cheek. "I hate him but it hurts, Remus."

"I can genuinely say I know how you feel." Remus squeezed Mione's hand. "But I'll be here for you."

"Remus, I..." Mione didn't know how to phrase her words.

"I already know, Mione." Remus pushed the tray away. "And I'm happy just to be your friend."

"What about what you said?" Mione had thought about it often when she'd sat at Remus' bedside.

"I meant it, Mione." Remus wasn't going to take it back. "And I know you don't feel the same way about me, but that's okay. I'd rather be your friend than nothing at all."

"I'm sorry." Mione wished she could offer Remus more, but she wasn't going to lie to him.

"Don't worry about it." Remus put his hand to his mouth as he yawned. "It's hard to believe but I'm tired."

"Let me take the tray." Mione removed it and put it on a side table. "Do you want me to stay with you?"

"Please." Remus might have understood Mione's feelings but that didn't mean he wanted her to leave him alone. "Where are you going to live now?"

"I don't know." Mione kicked off her shoes and climbed onto the bed beside Remus, feeling more comfortable than she had done all evening, as she curled up to his chest when he lifted his arm.

"I'm also going to need somewhere else to live as the Academy is obviously off-limits." Remus hoped that Nicole and her son had managed to reach his apartment as it was still protected by the Fidelius, particularly as Mione had told him that she hadn't been seen by anyone since Thomas had attacked Hogwarts, although Neville had been apprehended. "There's a house that was used by the slayers when we used Birmingham as a central HQ for a while. It still hasn't been sold yet, so I can use that. You and the children are welcome to move into it as well."

"I don't know." Mione was reluctant to do so. "Buffy, well, she's hoping to get back with you."

Remus closed his eyes. "I can't. Not even for the children. I almost started a fight with her when she was trying to help me shower. It just wouldn't work out, and after what's happened between us, I can't go back."

"Remus, don't let that influence you." Mione didn't want what had essentially been a moment of comfort to ruin his life.

"Too late." Remus answered honestly. "And while I can go back to being nothing more than your friend, I can't go back to being her lover." Remus looked down at Mione. "So, please, take my offer and move into the house."

"Maddie is being something of a handful at the moment." Mione revealed as she changed the topic of conversation, not ready to decide on her living situation just yet. "I had Sirius obliviate her of who Thomas was, and, I almost forgot, we found out from her what the final piece of the puzzle is."

"You're not changing the subject." Remus steered it back on course. "Mione, even with Theresa's help, you're going to find it tough to manage with the children and your job. I'm going to ask Sirius to set up yet another Fidelius for me, and it will mean that the children will be safe."

Mione hated imposing on Tonks, and she eventually agreed. "I'll say yes then but only until I find somewhere of my own. I'm lucky I've got my own bank account, but most of it is money that Thomas gave me."

"Don't feel guilty about using it." Remus could sense that that was her problem. "The children are his as well, and I doubt there'll be any maintenance order to provide for them."

Remus' words made Mione think. "Not in the wizarding world there won't be." She sat up. "But how about in the Muggle world? Remus, Thomas is a figure in the public eye, and head of a multi-billion dollar corporation. He can't afford to damage his reputation, not yet anyway."

"You can't be serious." Remus quickly twigged onto what Mione had planned.

"I'm taking that bastard to court." Mione gave a self-satisfied smile. "For as much as I can possibly get. I'm going to get a Muggle divorce."

"But that won't count in the wizarding world." Remus pointed out.

"It doesn't have to." Mione's mind was already forging ahead as to what she'd need to do. "We had two ceremonies, one Muggle and one wizarding. I know that officially I'll still be married to him as far as the wizarding world is concerned, but not in the Muggle world."

"You do know that he's going to be furious, don't you?" Remus could only imagine how angry Thomas would be.

"I don't care anymore." Mione set her face. "I don't care."

The Next Morning

Buffy found Remus sleeping, Mione tucked into his side, and she went to leave, only to stop when Remus called out her name. "I'm glad you're okay but I've obviously disturbed you."

Mione sat up. "Sorry, I fell asleep. Excuse me." She then left the room, knowing that Remus and Buffy needed to talk.

Buffy closed the door. "I'd hoped that we could make another go of things but it's not going to happen, is it?"

"Buffy, I can't." Remus hated upsetting her. "I love Mione, and it always going to be that way."

Tears started to fall, and Buffy made a snap decision. "I've got no reason to stay here anymore now that the Academy has gone, so I'm going to move back to the States."

"What about the girls?" Remus sat up.

"We'll sort something out." Buffy smiled through her tears. "But right now I can't talk about this."

Still weak from his ordeal, Remus could do nothing to stop her as she turned and left the room.

29th December 2011

Mione sighed heavily. "I don't know what to do with Maddie. I was afraid she was going to bring the house down with that last temper tantrum."

"You need to give her time." Remus pulled Mione against him when she gave him a wobbly smile. "She's been obliviated, and doesn't understand how bad things are. She's just a kid who wanted to see her Dad at Christmas, and doesn't understand why she can't."

"I can't tell her the truth, Remus." Mione snuggled closer, grateful for his comforting presence. "And I'm always going to have to lie to her."

"Then she's going to be no different than the rest of the wizarding or Muggle worlds." Remus reminded her of what Sirius had decided as the newly appointed Minister in the light of Dumbledore's death. "Sirius doesn't think that's it in the best interests of anyone if they learn who your husband really is."

"It's frustrating knowing he's out there, hiding behind a façade that doesn't belong to him." Mione had seen her husband on TV a few days earlier, the house in Birmingham being in a Muggle area. "But I suppose Sirius is right. The economic chaos that would ensue if the truth about Thomas came out would devastate the share prices of the company, and lead to far too many job losses. But the business isn't my biggest concern right now; it's Maddie."

"Do you want me to talk to her?" Remus offered.

"No, she's not your problem." Mione refused.

"Mione, I don't consider Maddie a problem." Remus pushed Mione's hair behind her ear. "How could I? She's your daughter."

"Remus, don't." Mione placed a hand on his chest.

"Sorry." Remus apologized. "I didn't mean to upset you."

"You didn't." Mione leant her forehead against his chest. "It's just that it's difficult enough now without complicating things." She stepped away. "And I think it's best if I started to look for a place of my own to live."

"Mione, this place is large enough for you and the children to stay." Remus took her hand again. "I promise I'll back off."

"I still think it's..." Mione stopped speaking as her stomach lurched. Clapping her free hand over her mouth, she tugged free of his grasp and ran.

Remus followed, ignoring her scandalized look as he went into the bathroom with her and held her while she was sick. "Was it something I said?"

Mione shook her head. "I've felt off color all day. Maddie's shenanigans were just the icing on the cake."

"I'll let you freshen up." Remus left the bathroom, and went straight to the fireplace.

Mione scowled when she found Craig Delaney waiting with Remus. "There was no need to call you; I've just got a little stomach upset. It's nothing I can't brew a potion for."

"Let me be the judge of that." Craig pointed to the sofa. "Lie down please."

With a heavy sigh, Mione lay back. "At least I know I'm not pregnant."

Aware of Mione's true background, Craig smiled at her. "But there are a thousand and one other things that could be up."

"Thanks for the reassuring words." Mione waited impatiently as Craig scanned her, before straightening up. "So what's the verdict?"

Remus had felt Craig's surprise. "Something's wrong, isn't it?"

"Not exactly." Craig ran a second scan over Mione. "Mione, why did you think you couldn't get pregnant?"

"I'm dead." Mione pointed out the obvious.

"And you're also dead wrong." Craig waved his wand above her stomach and a blue cloud appeared. "You're pregnant, Mione."

"No. No. No." Mione burst into tears as she realized that it was a boy, and therefore couldn't be Remus' baby. "Get it out of me. Get it out of me."

His visage grim, Remus dropped to his knees and gathered Mione against him. "Sh. It's going to be alright."

"No, it's not." Mione sobbed. "I've got his parasite inside of me. I don't want it. I don't want it."

Craig, of course, knew why Mione was so upset, and he rummaged through his medical bag. "Mione, I want you to take this."

Remus took the vial and gently fed it to Mione who was now crying so hard that she was struggling to breathe. "I'm going to help you get through this."

Her tears abating under the influence of the calming potion, Mione shook her head. "I don't want to get through it. I'm going to abort it."

"You can't." Craig reminded her of the pureblood laws. "Your own life would be forfeit if you did."

"Better that than carry his child." Mione was vehement in her response.

"Nat, Bella and Maddie need you, and they're his children too." Remus reminded her.

Mione picked up a vase and threw it at the wall. "I didn't think it could get any worse."

She was about to find out that it could.

The Next Day

Maddie sat miserably watching her mother and Remus talking quietly. She knew that there was something going on, but she didn't know what. She pulled a face when Mione came over and told her it was time for bed. "Do I have to?"

"Yes." Mione went to ruffle her daughter's hair, only for Maddie to pull away. "Mads..."

"Leave me alone." Maddie ran off.

Mione slumped, leaning back against Remus as he put his arms around her. "I don't know why you're still putting up with us."

"You know why." Remus turned Mione to face him. "And I don't consider taking care of you as putting up with you. Mione, I love you, and..."

Both he and Mione turned as a horrified gasp interrupted them, and a distraught looking Maddie ran back the way she'd just come from. "Just great."

Remus stopped Mione from going after her. "I'm sorry, I wasn't paying attention."

"It isn't your fault." Mione tugged her hand free. "I'll go up to her." When she got to Maddie's room, she found that she'd bolted the door. "Maddie, let me in."

"Go away." Maddie screamed, the house beginning to vibrate.

Mione staggered as the floor felt like quicksand under her feet, and she pulled out her wand. "Maddie, I'm coming in." The vibrations increased and Mione suddenly felt scared of her own daughter. "Okay, calm down. I'm going away." The vibrations quickly ceased, and Mione went back downstairs.

Remus had already guessed what had happened. "We're going to have to get a nullifer."

"She broke the last one." Mione reminded him. "I'll talk to her in the morning after she's calmed down. I'm afraid of what she'll do if I try again tonight."

"She really frightens you, doesn't she?" Remus wondered why he hadn't seen it before.

"Her power seems to be growing at an exponential rate, Remus." Mione had had Maddie tested after she'd broken all the windows in James' house, and she'd already jumped ten points over her previous reading. "I don't know if it's stress or true magical power but I'm scared of what she could do to others more than anything else."

"Are you sure you don't want me to talk to her?" Remus offered.

Mione reminded him of what Maddie had done last time. "If you hadn't been a werewolf, that head injury could have killed you."

"It wasn't her fault." Remus didn't blame Maddie. "I pushed her too hard." He rubbed the back of his head in memory. "But you might be right; perhaps tomorrow would be best. Which means that you're free to continue the conversation we started earlier."

"I still think it's best that I move out." Mione reiterated the comment that she'd made more than once since she'd found out that she was pregnant.

"I disagree." Remus led Mione to sit down. "You're already being sick all the time." After being sick that first time two days ago, Mione felt as if she'd done nothing but throw up since then. Remus continued. "And you're tired. And it's only going to get worse. Even with Theresa to help, when you add trying to do your job, and Maddie, and taking care of two other children, one of who needs more care than most, it's going to be too much. "

"But I'm a burden." Mione found the suddenly ever present tears had started flowing again.

Remus pulled her against him. "You'll never be a burden, Mione, and neither will your children."

Mione tried to lighten things up. "I bet you wish you'd found someone less complicated to fall for."

"No, I don't." Remus refuted Mione's statement. "And I never will."

Mione closed her eyes as Remus gently brushed his lips over hers, before kissing her more firmly. When the kiss ended, Mione didn't attempt to pull away. "Remus, what am I doing? I'm nowhere near over Thomas and don't know if I ever will be, I'm carrying his baby, Maddie's having a meltdown, Nat constantly wets his bed, and now you're kissing me, and..."

Remus kissed her again, stopping her babbling, before lifting his head. "Mione, you know how I feel about you but the kisses are nothing more than a way of comforting you, or in this case, shutting you up."

Mione gave a slightly hysterical giggle. "I'm such a wreck."

"I know." Remus kissed her nose. "And I think you should follow your daughter's example and head to bed. I'll check on Nat and Bella. I'll also check on Maddie when I can hear her sleeping."

"Thank you." Mione wanted nothing more than to hide from the world and her problems in sleep. Stressed and exhausted, it didn't take much for her to fall asleep. It seemed, however, only minutes had gone by when she was woken by Nat. "Have you wet the bed again, baby?"

"Nnno." Nat had developed a stutter which got worse when he was nervous. "Mmmads is gone."

Mione was suddenly wide awake. "Gone. Where?"

"Dddaddy." Nat struggled to get his words out. He pointed to the door.

Mione didn't bother with her robe and ran down the stairs, opened the front door and dashed into the street.

Next Chapter: Thomas and Mione come face to face. Mione's pregnancy doesn't go to plan. Lucy makes a new friend.

Chapter 77: Down The Rabbit Hole

31st December 2011

4.35a.m. Birmingham

Maddie had been awake since 4am, and, as she lay in bed, she thought about her current living conditions. While she loved her mother and Theresa, she hated living with Remus. Seeing her mother in Remus' arms, and hearing him tell her mother that he loved her, had profoundly upset Maddie, and she believed that it was Remus' fault that her parents were no longer together. Making her mind up as to what she was going to do, Maddie climbed out of bed, and pulled on her clothes, including her boots and a coat. Opening her bedroom door, she found Nat with his hand poised in mid-air about to knock. "Go back to bed, Nat."

"Where you going?" Nat couldn't miss the fact that his sister was dressed.

"To find Daddy." Maddie told him. "Now go back to bed."

Nat's lower lip trembled. "Me miss Daddy."

"So do I, Nat." Maddie hugged her brother. "When I find him, I'll ask Daddy to come and get you and Bella. But it's too cold out to take Bella, and I need you to look after her." Maddie copied what her mother always said to her.

"I want to go with you." Nat protested when his sister let go of him.

"You can't." Maddie was firm as she headed for the staircase. "You have to stay with Bella."

Ignoring his sister's entreaty, Nat followed her downstairs, watching her as she unlocked the front door and headed out into the night, swinging the door closed behind her. Having noticed it was dark outside, Nat began to worry in case Maddie couldn't find their Daddy, and he ran back upstairs to wake his mother.

On the doorstep, even though there was streetlighting, Maddie suffered her first pang of nerves as she looked around. However, thinking about who was in the house she'd just left, she lifted her chin and ran down the steps, and started to walk briskly up the street. Just as she reached an alley, a man loomed out of the shadows. "Hello, little one. What are you doing out here alone?"

Maddie was too frightened to scream, and she stood transfixed, shaking and uncertain what to do.

The man held out his hand. "I won't hurt you."

A small cracking sound, and then a menacing voice came from behind the man. "You're damn right you won't."

"Daddy!" Maddie rushed forward past the man, bursting into tears of relief as Thomas hugged her to him.

"Look, mister. I was on the way to work and was worried about such a young girl being out this early on her own." The man hadn't intended any harm, and believed that as Thomas was dressed in just his pajama bottoms and still had bare feet, he'd ran out of a nearby house after Maddie.

"Then I suggest you keep walking." Thomas' voice held no warmth.

Even though Thomas was only dressed in his pajamas, and wasn't obviously armed, the man felt a shiver of inexplicable fear go through him, and he turned and walked away, muttering about bad parents. Thomas hefted Maddie up into his arms as the man made himself scarce. "You're safe now, Mads. It's going to be alright."

Maddie sobbed pitifully against Thomas' neck. "I wanted to see you but Mummy wouldn't let me. So I ran away to find you." She lifted her head, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Can I come and live with you, Daddy? I hate living here with Uncle Remus."

Thomas kept his face clear of the anger that blossomed on hearing where his daughter was living. "Show me where you live, Maddie."

Maddie scrunched her forehead as she tried to recall where she'd just come from. "I don't know."

"Fidelius." Thomas realized that Mione had obviously taken the precaution of not including the children in it. "Don't you ever leave the house?"

"No. Mummy said it's too dangerous because someone's after us." Maddie bit her lip as she thought about her mother's warning. "She's going to be so angry with me."

Mione's voice interrupted them. "No, I won't be. Thomas, put my daughter down."

Thomas turned around, and shifted Maddie in his arms, so that he could see his wife, who was standing, wand drawn, on the pavement twenty-five feet or so from him in her nightdress, and like him was barefooted. "So you left his bed long enough to notice she was missing, did you?"

"It's not even five o'clock in the morning, Thomas, and I was sleeping." Mione had spotted the time as she'd ran past the Grandfather clock in the hallway. "Maddie shouldn't even have been out of her bed at this time, let alone roaming the streets."

Thomas noted that Mione didn't deny being in Remus' bed, and he didn't hide his fury from his wife. "Big fucking deal, Mione. It doesn't change the fact that she was out here alone." Thomas hushed his daughter when she started at his language. "She doesn't even know where she lives. What was she supposed to have done if I hadn't come along?"

"She knows to find an adult and tell them to take her to the Muggle police station." Mione had given strict instructions to the children if for any reason they found themselves outside alone. "But she also knows that she was forbidden to leave the house."

"Then you should have made sure that she was unable to. She was being accosted by a so-called adult when I found her. He could have

taken our daughter and done Merlin only knows what to her." Thomas snapped.

"You know as well as I do that her accidental magic would have flared up." Mione argued.

"You're wrong, Mione. Maddie was too fucking frightened to do anything but stand there when I found her." Thomas rubbed Maddie's back as she continued to sob, her hair starting to rise as she began to get upset at the anger in her parents' voices. "It's okay, Angel. Mummy and Daddy are just having an argument; it's nothing bad. Adults do it all the time." Thomas turned back to his wife. "And I'm telling you now, I'm not leaving her here with you so that it can happen again."

"You're not taking her." Mione took a step closer.

Remus seemed to appear out of nowhere without a sound, an effect of the Fidelius. "Mione, have you found..." His head turned as he recognized Thomas' scent. "Seville."

"Half-breed." Thomas snarled and finally withdrew his own wand.

Frightened by the vitriol in her father's voice, Maddie started shivering, and her hair began to float again. "I want to go home now, Daddy." Maddie begged, just wanting the arguing to be over.

Mione shook her head, her voice desperate. "No, you can't take her."

Thomas ignored Mione, and kissed Maddie's forehead. "Let's go then."

Remus grabbed Mione as she bolted forward. "No, Mione. You'll get hurt."

"Let go of me." Mione struggled futilely. "He can't have her."

"I'd listen to the half-breed if I was you." Thomas warned. "I'm taking my daughter home with me. You obviously can't take care of her."

"But I can still come and visit Mummy, can't I?" Maddie wanted to go with Thomas but she still loved her mother. "It was his fault that I ran away."

"We'll see." Thomas didn't promise anything, and he prepared to vanish, only to stop as Nat also seemed to appear out of nowhere. Afraid when no-one had come back in, Nat had decided to follow them, even though Remus had told him to stay inside.

Nat saw Thomas and Maddie, and his face lit up. This time he didn't stutter as he was more excited than nervous at the sight of his father. "Daddy."

"No." Still in Remus' grasp, Mione reached out and managed to grab Nat's arm, before he could run towards Thomas. "Nat, you have to stay here."

Nat immediately did as he was told, and was pulled back against Mione. Thomas held out his hand. "Come here, Nat."

Nat now felt torn, and his nerves began to resurface. "Mmmummy?"

Mione kissed his head. "Relax, baby. It's okay." She looked over at Thomas. "He's going nowhere with you."

Several sharp pops signaled the arrival of Aurors, and Thomas decided it was time to leave. "This isn't over, Mione. I'm going to get my children back."

"Hurt her, and I swear I'll kill you myself." Mione warned her husband as she knew that she could do nothing to stop him.

Harry was just in time to see Thomas vanish with Maddie, and he came running over. "Are you alright?"

"No." Mione started to cry.

Remus scowled at Harry, having alerted BritAD to Maddie's disappearance before he left the house. "What took you?"

"I was dealing with an attack on the Houses of Parliament." Harry held up his arm, showing how bloody it was. He smiled at Nat who was shaking, not understanding what was going on. "Hey soldier. Do you want to help your Uncle Harry clean up his arm? The baddies got me."

Nat loved Harry, and easily distracted, he nodded eagerly, his terror quickly fading. "Me will clean it."

"I will clean it." Mione corrected him through her tears.

Harry turned to the girl who'd moved to stand next to him. "Jericho, I want a six man patrol set up for the next 48 hours on this road. Set up type B wards."

"Yes, Sir." Edwina Jericho, who'd become a sort of sidekick to Harry when he'd discovered that he really hadn't been able to work well with Calico, began to bark out orders.

Remus scooped Mione up, and carried her in, ignoring her protests. Nat grinned down at Harry as Harry lifted him onto his shoulders. "Mummy poorly, Uncle Harry."

Harry presumed that it wasn't anything too serious, as he noted that Nat was clearly relaxed about it as he wasn't stuttering any longer. "Probably too many Christmas chocolates." He tickled Nat's leg making him giggle. "Let's go get my arm fixed."

Mione had calmed down by the time Harry returned with Nat, a haphazardly wrapped bandage covering his wound. "I see Nat fixed you up."

Nat looked proud of himself. "I never sicked, Mummy."

Mione didn't bother to correct him this time. "Well done, baby. Theresa's in the kitchen. Go and ask if she'll fix breakfast for you."

"Okay." Nat dashed off.

Mione exhaled. "Thanks for dealing with him, Harry. I couldn't have coped if he'd had a meltdown on top of this."

"I take it you've had a calming potion." Harry guessed, before making a suggestion. "Perhaps you'd best double the dosage, given what's happened."

Mione refused. "I can only have one."

Harry questioned her as she refused the dosage. "Are you alright? Nat said you were poorly."

Mione shared a look with Remus, before haltingly telling Harry the truth. "It's just morning sickness. I'm pregnant, Harry."

"Merlin." Harry was absolutely rocked. "How is that even possible?"

"We don't know." Remus stroked Mione's hair as she leant back against him.

"So does this mean that the two of you are together now?" Harry asked hopefully.

Remus shook his head. "It's not my baby. Mione and I are just friends."

Harry's heart sank. "Shit, it's Thomas' baby then, isn't it?"

Mione nodded miserably. "Yes. I wanted to abort it but Craig reminded me of the pureblood laws."

"Apart from the baby, are you physically okay?" Harry could barely believe that Mione was pregnant with Thomas' baby.

Mione rested her head against Remus' chest. "Fine, unless you count too much stress, which my daughter has just exacerbated."

"Thomas won't hurt Maddie." Harry was, however, worried about Thomas' previous threat about introducing Maddie into his other world.

Mione too had the same concerns. "It's not physical hurt I'm concerned about."

Remus wrapped her tighter in his arms. "We're going to get her back, Mione."

Harry could feel Remus' love for Mione, and her despair and exhaustion. "I need to talk to you both about what's happened, but first I want Craig to check Mione over." As Remus had when he'd carried Mione in, Harry too ignored Mione's protests, and she found herself being treated by Craig yet again.

Craig frowned as he scanned Mione. "I'm afraid that there's some sort of anomaly in the baby's blood that didn't show up a few days ago. I don't know why though."

"What sort of anomaly?" Despite her avowal that she didn't want the baby, Mione felt a spike of fear lance through her.

"I don't know until I take a blood sample." He double-checked his findings. "Given how far along you are, I can do the test in about four weeks' time, as up until then I won't be able to do any magic on the baby to correct any problems."

Harry took charge as Remus began to reassure Mione that everything was going to be okay, sensing, as Harry had, Mione's fear. "Should she be doing anything in the meantime?"

"I'm going to put an anti-rejection spell on her that will need to be renewed in a week's time." Craig did it as he spoke. "Other than that, she should just try and rest until we can get the problem resolved."

Penrith Cottage

Thomas lowered Maddie to the ground. "Are you hungry?"

"A little." Maddie's stomach grumbled as she wiped her eyes, her tears stopping now that she was safe and with her father. "Where are we?"

"This is Uncle Regulus' house." Thomas was aware that Maddie should have recognized it, but he said nothing, and sat her down. "Let's see what he's got in his fridge. He hasn't got any house-elves here right now so we might have to cook ourselves." Mitzzy had disappeared just after Cammie been taken, and Regulus had presumed that the devoted house-elf had followed her mistress.

"You don't know how to cook, Daddy." Now that she was calmer, Maddie's usual bossy attitude reasserted itself, and she marched over to the fridge. "Does Uncle Regulus have a grill in his oven?"

Thomas glanced at the controls uncertainly. "Err, yes." He was taken aback when Maddie started pulling food out of the fridge. "What are you doing?"

"Making cheese and tomato on toast." Maddie started hunting for a knife, and found a large one in a drawer.

Thomas immediately removed it from his daughter's hand. "I can do a spell to slice cheese."

Ten minutes later Regulus stumbled into the kitchen, only to do a double-take. "Maddie?"

"Hi, Uncle Regulus." Maddie beamed at him. "I made cheese and tomato on toast."

"I can smell it." Regulus yawned widely as he flicked the switch up on the coffee pot. "How did you get here?"

"I didn't want to live with Uncle Remus so I ran away, and Daddy found me." Maddie explained before taking a large mouthful of milk. "Mummy didn't want me to go though, but Daddy said I can visit."

"I said we'll see." Thomas reminded his daughter of his exact words. "I'll tell you more later, Reg."

As he got down his coffee mug, Regulus asked after his girlfriend. "Do you know if Cammie is alright?"

"She doesn't live with us; she lives with Aunt Hermione." Maddie informed him, before pulling a face. "I'm kind of glad because she was always crying when we lived at Aunt Hermione's. Mummy said it was because she's going to have a baby, and it was something to do with her monees or something like that." Having been obliterated, Maddie couldn't remember that Cammie and Regulus had been a couple.

The mug in Regulus' hands slipped from his lifeless fingers, and smashed onto the floor. "Baby?"

Maddie nodded, and went on in a hopeful voice. "I want her to have a girl but Mummy said that it's a boy. Do you think she might be wrong, Uncle Regulus?"

Regulus staggered to a chair and sat down, and answered Maddie in a distracted voice. "No."

Maddie was disappointed, and it showed in the exasperated tone of her voice. "Everyone is having boys. Aunt Luna had another boy called Christian, and now Aunt Cammie is having a boy." Maddie had no idea that her mother was in the same situation.

Regulus got up. "Excuse me."

Maddie's lip trembled as Regulus had sounded short with her. "Did I do something wrong, Daddy?"

"No, Mads. Uncle Regulus is just tired." Thomas informed her, as he attempted to confirm his belief that Maddie had to have been obliterated since she clearly hadn't connected Cammie to Regulus. "Mads, can you remember the argument Mummy and I had when we went to Disneyworld?"

"What argument, Daddy?" Maddie swallowed some more of her milk.

Thomas knew for certain then that she'd been obliterated, and he decided for the time being to leave things as they stood. "It doesn't matter. Finish your milk."

Two Days Later

Regulus scowled as a knock disturbed him. "Come in."

"I know you're busy, but I need your help." Thomas dropped a sheaf of papers onto his desk. "Mione wants a divorce."

"She can't have one; she knows that." Regulus picked up the papers. "Ah. I'd almost forgotten that you had a Muggle ceremony as well as a wizarding one."

"My wife hasn't." Thomas sat down. "While she knows that we can't divorce in the wizarding world, there's nothing binding us together legally in the Muggle world except for a piece of paper. A piece of paper that she wants eradicated for a tidy sum of money."

"Are you okay with that?" Regulus pushed aside the matter he'd been working on.

"I was angry when my secretary brought the package in and I realized what it was, but on reflection it's probably for the best." Thomas was nothing if not pragmatic. "With all the rumors that are circulating about the state of my marriage, it might be better if we issue a statement saying that Mione and I have officially separated."

"You're going along with this for the business?" Regulus had seen the share price in some of the holdings Thomas owned dip with the rumors that his marriage was in trouble, as investors speculated that his company might also be in the same condition..

"Yes, and for me." Thomas rubbed his bare finger; he no longer wore his wedding band. "What happened the other morning with Maddie was the final straw. Mione's moved in with Lupin, and I think it's time I also moved on."

"You can't really be over her that quickly." Regulus wasn't convinced by his friend's words.

"I'm not, but I will be." Thomas stood up. "Will you handle the divorce for me? I'm happy to pay her the \$250 million she's requested but on the proviso that it's put in trust for the children's benefit and not hers. She's living with that bastard now; he can pay for her trinkets and whatever else she might want."

"She wants proceedings to take place in this country." Regulus noted.

"I want them to take place in Australia as that's where we got married, and I'm a citizen there. In Sydney it should only take a matter of a few months to complete the divorce, and I can pull some strings if necessary, since I'm quite sure Mione will agree to a quicker divorce than she'd get here in England." Thomas also knew that BritAD had no jurisdiction in Australia. The Australian magical government had voted to be automonus from Great Britain when they'd first settled the country along with Muggles. "And it also means that Sebastian won't be able to do anything to apprehend me or you when we attend court, which is probably what that bitch had planned."

"I'll need to consult someone in the Sydney law office." Regulus wasn't exactly au fait with Australian Muggle law. "I can draft a response that I believe will be suitable but I can't practise law there."

"Jim Duggan is the man to contact." Thomas gave the name of the senior partner. "But I'd still like you there, and I'd also like you to draw up papers to file for sole custody of all three children."

"Playing Mione at her own game?" Regulus made a few notes on a sheet of paper.

"She knows only too well that I'm bound by my duty to the company to follow the Muggle law to the letter." Thomas wasn't blind to Mione's plan. "So I'm going to do what any Muggle father would do in a divorce, and file for custody of my children. So I'd like you deal with that as well."

"Consider it done." Regulus slipped the papers into a folder. "I'll draw something up and you can look it over, before I pass it to Duggan to knock into shape and file. But it'll be a few days before I can deal with

it, as I have the Kilitron case on Tuesday, and I still have things I need to get done for that."

"Then I'll leave you alone." Thomas paused before opening the door. "If you need to talk about Cammie, you can talk to me, you know."

"Thanks, but not right now." Regulus declined the offer and picked up the work he'd been dealing with when Thomas had interrupted him. "Sorry, Thomas, but I really have to concentrate on this."

Unoffended at being turfed out, Thomas rejoined his daughter.

12th January 2012

Thomas frowned. "You really can't watch Maddie for me?"

"I'm sorry but I have several important court cases in New York today." Regulus continued to put his papers into his briefcase. "How about leaving her with a house-elf?"

"That's all well and good for a few minutes, but I'm not leaving her alone with one of them for hours on end." Thomas had actually left Maddie at Grimmauld Square in the care of a house-elf while he apparated to see Regulus.

"Leave her with Potter." Regulus suggested. "She already knows him."

"I've reassigned him to Hogwarts." Thomas reminded him. "And Maddie knows he's on Dominus' side now, and as I'm not telling her who I am until this court case is over, I can't tell her that he's actually serving me." After what had happened, Harry Potter had had little choice but to act as if he'd cut off himself from his friends and family, as Thomas believed that Mione would have revealed Harry's involvement to Sirius.

"How about Lucy?" Regulus made yet another suggestion, as he closed his briefcase. "It's not as if she's doing anything else."

"I don't know." Thomas thought about how snotty Lucy could be.

"I'm sure she'll be nicer to Mads than she is to you." Regulus smirked at his friend, and checked his wristwatch, a tiny pang going through him as he thought about who'd bought it for him. "Sorry, Thomas, but I don't want to get on the judge's wrong side by being late."

"Go." Thomas ordered. "I'll ask Lucy."

Castrum House

Lucy stared in amazement at Thomas after he'd made the same request of her as he had of Regulus. "You want me to babysit your daughter?"

"She's only eight and I have meetings to attend, and I can't leave her alone." Thomas was already running late, and he didn't really have time to argue with Lucy. "It's not that a big of a deal. She's only one child."

"So why don't you ask Ginny Zabini to look after her?" Lucy thought about the girl who had recently given birth. "She's already got two kids, so one more won't be a big deal."

"I wouldn't trust her with my daughter." Thomas didn't bother to add that he didn't really like Ginny either, who, like the rest of the Inner Circle and their apprentices, were now residing in Castrum House. "However, I do trust you."

"Like I believe that." Lucy disparaged Thomas' comment. "What about Reg?"

"I asked Reg first, but he has court cases today." Thomas sighed heavily, as he considered pulling out his wand and threatening Lucy. "Look, Lucy, I know you don't like me but Maddie's just a child and has never done anything to you. Do it for her, if you won't do it for me."

Lucy scowled as Thomas appealed to her on his daughter's behalf. "Fine, but just this once."

"Thank you." Lucy was still bristling when Thomas apparated her to Grimmauld Square and called out for his daughter. "Maddie?"

A dark-haired girl came running into the hallway, only to adopt a stubborn look when she saw Lucy. "Who's she?"

"Lucy is a friend, and she's going to stay with you while I go to Boston." Thomas hoped that Maddie wouldn't pull her usual trick of a tantrum.

"I don't want to stay with her." Maddie it perfectly clear what she wanted. "I want to go with you, Daddy."

"Well you can't." Thomas picked up his briefcase. "I have meetings."

"I hate her." Maddie folded her arms. "She's horrid."

"Gee, thanks." Lucy said something to the girl for the first time. "It's nice to be hated by someone you've only just met."

Maddie was immediately distracted by Lucy's accent. "You talk like the people in Daddy's New York office." Thomas had taken her into the office with him the previous week when he hadn't had meetings to attend.

"I used to live in New York but I was born in Orlando." Lucy revealed her background.

"I've been to Orlando." Maddie offered up the information. "I went to Disneyworld with Mummy and Daddy."

"I went with my parents as well." Lucy could see that she'd managed to light upon a subject that Maddie was fond of. "What was your favorite ride?"

"Splash Mountain." Maddie's face lit up. "Do you want to go again?"

"I'd love to." Lucy motioned behind her back with her hand to Thomas to tell him to go. "We can talk more about it in a minute. We have something more important to talk about first."

"What?" Maddie eyed Lucy warily.

Lucy grinned at her. "I need to know whether you have any ice-cream in this place."

"Daddy doesn't let me have ice-cream between meals." Maddie answered honestly.

"But Daddy's not here." Lucy winked and held out her hand. "So do you want ice-cream? I know I do."

As Lucy commented on her father's absence, Maddie finally noticed he'd disappeared while she'd been talking to Lucy. However, rather than bemoan the fact, Maddie honed in on the tempting proposition of ice-cream. "I'd like some but Daddy might be angry."

Lucy shrugged, and she whispered conspiratorially to Maddie. "I'm not afraid of him. I'll tell him I made you do it."

Maddie giggled as she slipped her hand into Lucy's. "I'll show you where the kitchen is. Dixie will get us some ice-cream."

The two of them headed to the kitchen, Maddie rabbiting on about Orlando.

When Thomas returned home it was almost nine o'clock, and he found Lucy sitting reading in his drawing room with her feet up on his antique sofa, chewing on a toasted cheese sandwich without a plate to catch the crumbs. "I see you made yourself at home."

"I was hardly going to stand up all day." Lucy was completely unperturbed by his comment. "Speaking of home, will you take me back to Castrum House now?" As she'd refused the Dark Mark, Lucy was unable to apparate in and out without help.

"You can stay here." Thomas offered, finding himself wanting some company after the crappy day he'd had. "There are plenty of guest rooms. How was Maddie?"

"Great. She's a nice kid." Lucy had liked the girl who, despite her initial reaction to Lucy, had quickly warmed to her. "By the way, she's going to ask you to take her to Disneyworld again."

"It's been her favorite destination ever since we took her for Christmas." Thomas dropped his briefcase to the floor, and tugged off his tie. "I'd ask if you want any dinner but you seem to have dealt with that problem yourself."

"Dixie was good enough to make this for me." Lucy had liked the desperate to please house-elf. "However, I wouldn't say no to a glass of wine. I didn't want to drink until you got home as I had sole responsibility for your daughter."

"Red, white or champagne?" Thomas offered.

"White, and fairly dry if you have it." Lucy specified her choice.

"I have just the thing." Thomas disappeared and returned with a bottle. "I have a cellar beneath the house. If you ever stay here again, feel free to help yourself. I'll leave you a cell phone number so if there's a next time, and you do have a drink, you can call me if a problem crops up."

"There isn't going to be a next time. But theoretically, what happens if there is and I pick an expensive wine by mistake?" Lucy knew that someone like Thomas would likely have such wines in his cellar.

"Then you'd better enjoy it." Thomas didn't really care what she drank. "Try this."

"What is it?" Lucy took a sip, savoring the dry fruity flavor.

"Unoaked chardonnay. It's one of Cammie's favorites." Thomas sat down, and shook his head as he watched Lucy curl back up on his sofa. "I just don't understand you."

"I beg your pardon." Lucy was thrown by the change in conversation.

"You know what I'm capable of, yet you're unafraid of me; you've obviously managed to win over my very temperamental daughter; you lounge around as if you own the place, and you've dropped crumbs all over my extremely expensive sofa." Thomas remarked in a slightly acerbic tone. "And no matter what happens, you're completely unfazed."

"I wasn't always like this." Lucy admitted. "But that's another story."

"Tell me." Thomas demanded.

Lucy told him what had happened with Cassandra and Starr. "But I guess you already know a lot of that."

"Not your part in it." Thomas admitted. "So why did you change?"

"Because Auror Sebastian showed me that I can't be afraid all the time." Lucy gave a rueful smile. "He's the one who taught me the hand to hand combat."

"He's a brilliant teacher." Thomas gave credit where it was due. "You almost killed me."

"I did my best." Lucy grinned nastily. "It would hardly have been a fitting end for you though, would it? Killed by a slip of a girl and an American to boot."

"Perhaps they should have put that on Dumbledore's gravestone." Thomas watched the smile slide off Lucy's face. "He didn't deserve to live, Lucy."

"Neither do you, but you're still alive." Lucy, as always, didn't bother to hide her opinion.

"As are you." Thomas wasn't put off by her comment.

"Good point." Lucy got up. "Would you like to show me to my room then?"

"You don't want to keep me company while I eat dinner?" Thomas also rose to his feet.

"Do you want me to be polite or honest?" Lucy topped off her wine glass.

"Polite." Thomas picked up the wine bottle. "As I know it means that you'll sit through my dinner with me."

"Lead the way." Lucy didn't bother putting her trainers back on as she followed Thomas into the dining room. Once they'd sat down, he began to quiz her more on USAD, and her friends. Lucy pulled a wry face as she summed everything up. "After that, I wasn't entirely sure whether they were my friends anymore or not, especially as I didn't hear from any of them again, even though I wrote several times."

Having just finished his starter, a platter loaded with roast beef and yorkshire puddings appeared in front of Thomas, and he began to pick pieces off and place them on his dinner plate. "Then you shouldn't consider them friends."

"It wouldn't matter if I did. I'm a fugitive and they're Aurors." Lucy reached over and stole a Yorkshire pudding off Thomas' plate, ignoring the platter. "So there ends that saga."

"You do realize that most people would be too frightened to do that, don't you?" Thomas helped himself to vegetables from the side dishes that had appeared.

"That's their problem." Lucy lifted the lid off a dish and pulled a face. "I hate vegetables."

"They're good for you." Thomas bit into a baby carrot, before spearing one and offering it to her. "These are sweet; try one."

"I said I hate vegetables." Lucy repeated.

"I'll let you have another Yorkshire pudding if you try it." Thomas negotiated with her as he would his daughter.

"Whatever." Lucy plucked the carrot off his fork and bit into it, a surprised look appearing on her face. "That's not bad."

"I told you." Thomas speared several more. "Here."

"What do I get if I eat these?" Lucy took the fork from him.

"Anything you want." Thomas picked up a spare fork and carried on eating his dinner.

"In that case, I'd like..." Lucy thought about something ridiculous she could ask for as she ate the carrots. "...some diamond earrings."

Thomas withdrew a box from his pocket. "Catch."

Lucy reflexively caught the box, her mouth dropping open in surprise as she lifted the lid to find a pair of diamond studded earrings inside. "There's no way you could have known I'd ask for these."

"I didn't. Most women like diamonds, and so I got them to say thank you for looking after Maddie." Thomas topped off his glass as he waited for a response.

"That's a hell of a babysitting fee." Lucy closed the box. "But I can't accept them. It's not as if I exactly had a job to go to."

"The earrings are non-returnable, so you may as well keep them." When Lucy slipped the box into her jacket pocket, Thomas placed another of his puddings and some roast beef with gravy onto a small side plate and pushed it over to Lucy. "You don't like the fact that you haven't got a job anymore, do you?"

Lucy's mouth had been watering at the aroma of the beef, and she found herself accepting the plate. "Thanks to you, no I don't, and I'm bored silly. There's only so much you can do when you can't leave a building."

"What did you do at BritAD?" Thomas had no real idea what Lucy's position had entailed.

"When I wasn't on patrol, I helped Auror Sebastian." Lucy wondered who'd taken her place now. "It was mostly paperwork; balancing figures, scheduling, ordering equipment, that sort of thing."

"You're good with numbers?" Thomas decided he'd had enough to eat and pushed his plate away.

"I achieved a major in Muggle Business Studies at nineteen, and I got the highest ever score for Arithmancy at Salem." Lucy was proud of what she'd achieved.

"USAD require a Muggle degree, don't they?" Thomas recalled what he'd been told.

"Yes." Lucy then went on further. "We're somewhat more integrated into the Muggle world than you are over here, and it was made a requirement ten years ago. I also have a minor in English literature but it's hardly my strong suit."

"We all have our weak spots." Thomas contemplated what Lucy had just told, and given the day he'd had, he made a suggestion. "Lucy, would you like to do some work for me?"

"As in a proper job?" Lucy wasn't sure if he was joking or not.

"Yes." Thomas took a mouthful of wine. "I'm good with figures but I don't necessarily always enjoy that side of my job."

"You must have people who could do it for you." Lucy thought he was just being kind, if she could believe it.

"I have, but I tend to take a lot of things home with me, and I have no intention of letting a Muggle into my home." Thomas rose to his feet. "Come with me."

A Yorkshire pudding in her hand, Lucy followed him back into the drawing room where he opened his briefcase and pulled out several folders. After opening one up, he passed several sheets of paper to Lucy, who quickly crammed the remainder of the pudding into her

mouth, and wiped her fingers on her jeans. "Look at that report and give me your honest opinion."

Lucy scanned the sheets, taking in the various notations and figures. After reading the report, Lucy summed up her findings. "Is that what you wanted from me?"

Thomas was impressed. "Exactly what I wanted. It took my assistant several hours to come to the same conclusions you came to within ten minutes, and he missed several points you caught."

"You can't tell me that you hadn't worked out what I did already." Lucy was conscious that in order to do his job effectively, Thomas needed to be au fait with the companies he was intending to buy. "So why ask me to look this over?"

"I don't have time to babysit my assistant, who should be capable of doing this on his own." Thomas rubbed his head, as one of his usual headaches threatened. "You'd save me a great deal of time and stress if you agreed to work for me."

"What about your assistant?" Lucy wondered if Thomas had killed him.

"I fired him this afternoon." Thomas had apparated to New York to do so after he'd realized that the things his assistant had missed were key points, and could have cost him a major deal. "So do you want his job?"

"Two months ago I thought I was going to die at your hands, and now I find myself being offered a job by you." Lucy's own head ached a little. "The world's gone crazy."

"It's surprising how quickly your life can change in the blink of an eye. Two months ago I thought I was happily married. Now my wife is living with someone else, is divorcing me in the Muggle world, and has two of my children." Thomas straightened up after replacing the papers in his briefcase, and changed the subject back to the job. "So is that a yes?"

"If I say yes, then I need to know what you expect from me." Despite her situation, Lucy had no intention of just accepting, especially given the fact that she didn't like Thomas.

Thomas spent several hours going over what he was looking for. "I'll give you the same benefits as everyone else in the company, not that you really need free health insurance. And I'll start you off on say, a hundred thousand a year."

"A hundred thousand dollars?" Lucy was absolutely stunned.

"Pounds." Thomas clarified. "Believe me, if you take the job, you'll earn it, and wherever I go, you'll go."

"Just as long as you don't expect any extracurricular activity." Lucy warned him, wanting to get that out in the open.

"I don't." Thomas did, however, expect something else. "But I would like you to take care of Maddie if I'm unable to. She obviously likes you as the house is still standing."

"What?" Lucy thought the comment odd.

"The last time I upset Maddie really badly she blew out all of the windows in Castrum House as well as injuring me." Thomas revealed.

"But she's only, what, eight you said, wasn't it?" Lucy checked that she'd heard Thomas right. "And what was she doing in Castrum House?"

"She was in Castrum House as she was aware that I was Dominus but Mione has since had her obliterated. I'll tell Maddie again whom I am after my divorce comes through." Thomas answered Lucy's second question first.

Lucy brought up the Castrum House puzzle. "And what about the windows she blew out?"

"Maddie is eight as you correctly stated. But she registers at over 200 on the Magus scale already." Thomas didn't know that Maddie's

potential had risen again because his daughter hadn't mentioned it. "So we've had a few hairy moments when her accidental magic gets out of hand."

"That's some sort of accidental magic." Lucy had broken a few windows and the like growing up, but nothing on the same scale as Maddie. "Then again, I can't say that I'm surprised she's so powerful. I heard what you said to Dumbledore. You must be quite a bit over 300 yourself."

"I am." Thomas didn't reveal exactly how much over. "How about you?"

"All the twos." Lucy had been delighted when she'd been tested. "Most Aurors seems to test over two hundred; I don't know why."

"Neither do I." Thomas owned up to a gap in his knowledge. At that moment the clock struck midnight. "Now I think it's time I showed you to your room."

Lucy was led up the stairs, and to a particularly large and attractive guest suite. "I know Maddie's room is on this floor but is yours?"

"I thought you weren't interested." Thomas couldn't resist baiting her.

"I'm not." Lucy's voice was firm. "It's in case Maddie wakes up and wants you."

"If she's upset, I'll know." Thomas assured her. "But thank you for considering her."

"As I said earlier, she's a nice kid, even in spite of who her father is." Lucy snarked back at Thomas.

"That was no compliment." Thomas knew that despite their fairly pleasant conversation that evening, and her agreeing to work for him, Lucy didn't like him.

"It wasn't supposed to be." Lucy walked to the door and pointedly waited. "So, goodnight then."

"Before I go, you should know that while you were in the bathroom, I took the liberty of sending a house elf to collect some clothes for you." Thomas pointed to the ornate wardrobe. "You should find all that you need in there."

"I never did ask." Lucy brought up the subject of the closet at Castrum House. "Who did all that stuff I'm wearing now belong to?"

"It was bought for you." Thomas could see he'd surprised her. "If that's everything, then I'll see you at breakfast at 8am. We'll begin work at nine."

"Goodnight." Lucy waited for Thomas to leave, before closing the door, and leaning against it. "I've really fallen down the rabbit hole now."

7th February 2012

Craig sat down in front of Mione as he began to check her over. "How are you feeling?"

"Miserable. Everything hurts and I feel terrible." Mione had never felt so awful in her life.

"I think you don't feel so well because whatever is wrong with the baby is affecting you. You'll be glad to hear that it's time to take that blood sample." Craig withdrew a vial. "The baby is large enough now for me to perform spells on it to try and correct whatever is wrong."

"What if I don't want you to?" Mione had been weighing up the options in her mind.

"I have to." Craig said regretfully. "If I find that there's something seriously wrong with it, then, and only then can I offer you the option of abortion."

"Take the blood then." Mione didn't feel a thing as Craig waved his wand over her stomach and withdrew blood both from her and the baby. "How long before you know?"

"A few hours if you want me to look at it now." Craig had already cleared his calendar having been forewarned by Remus about Mione's worsening feelings towards the baby.

"I do, thank you." Mione got up as Craig left and placed a hand on her stomach. "I'm sorry, little one."

The Next Day

Craig returned to find an exhausted looking Mione pacing the floor, as she'd only slept fitfully during the night when Craig hadn't returned, and being a full moon, she hadn't had Remus to turn to. "Sorry it took so long. Sit down."

"What's wrong with the baby?" Mione asked immediately, believing that that it had to be something majorly serious for Craig to have taken so long.

"I've got good news and bad news." Craig took Mione's hand in his, and began to steer her towards her bed. "What do you want first?"

"Bad news." Mione's voice began to shake.

"The baby's blood is different from yours, and it's that what is making you feel so ill." Craig then gave Mione the good news. "Mione, the baby's father can't be Thomas. The blood tests show that the baby's father is lupine, which is why your body is fighting to reject the baby."

"Lupine?" Mione repeated his word dazedly. "But werewolves can't have sons."

"It isn't that they can't have sons. It's that the mother's body always rejects the fetus if it is a boy at the moment of conception, and she doesn't experience anything other than what she believes is a normal menstrual cycle." Craig explained the truth behind the concept.

"But I don't have menstrual cycles." Mione hadn't had one since she'd died.

"Your unusual physiology may be the answer to why your body hasn't rejected the child yet, even though it's fighting hard to do so now. As to why you'd suddenly become fertile, I don't know the answer to that, and I'm not willing to run tests as I don't want to do anything to jeopardize the health of the baby." Craig had spent hours going over his books to try and find something that might relate to Mione but couldn't locate anything. Afterwards he'd read up on everything he could find about lupine births. "Only one instance of a baby lupine boy being born has ever previously been recorded. The mother went into labor two months early, with both mother and baby surviving. So, given that, I'm going to have to ask you to spend the remainder of your pregnancy off your feet as much as possible. I'll be returning every week to check on the anti-rejection spell, and I'll cast another one now. I'm also going to give you something to help with the discomfort you're experiencing."

Mione sat numbly as Craig did so. "I need to know for sure that you're right. Can you determine who the father is if you receive his blood?"

"Is it Remus' baby?" Craig had seen how protective the werewolf was of her.

"Yes." Mione still couldn't bring herself to believe it though, even as she answered Craig. "He's asleep in his room at the moment, as it was a full moon last night. But I don't want him to know the truth about the baby until I'm absolutely sure; it would upset him too much."

Craig understood. "I may as well check him over while I'm here to make sure that he's doing better than last month." Craig walked along the corridor and tapped gently on Remus' door.

Remus groggily lifted his head. "Come in."

Craig entered the room. "Sorry to bother you but Mione reminded me that it was a full moon last night, so I thought I'd check you over, especially given what happened to you last month."

"I'm okay." Remus had had a bad transformation, and had tried to rip himself apart; something Craig had believed to be an aftereffect of

the tainted Wolfsbane Remus had received at Thomas' hand. "Just exhausted."

Craig waved his wand over Remus. "You're right. You're no worse than usual. Do you mind if I take some blood just as a precautionary measure?"

Remus yawned. "Go ahead."

Craig withdrew the blood. "Thanks. I'll let you go back to sleep."

Still muzzy, Remus lay back and closed his eyes as Craig left his room.

Hurrying back next door, Craig held out the vial. "Okay. Let's find out." He opened his bag and withdrew a rack of potions before selecting one. "You'd be surprised at how many women ask me to check this."

"Probably not for the same reason I'm asking." Mione watched as Craig dropped some of Remus' blood into the one of the potions, before waving his wand over Mione's stomach and extracting a few drops from the baby, and dropping them in as well.

Mione waited with bated breath as the potion turned green, and she started to cry with sheer relief. "Thank Merlin."

Craig handed her a handkerchief. "I also carry a lot of these around."

Mione gave a gurgling laugh. "Thanks."

"Try and take it easy, Mione." Craig kissed her cheek. "I'll be back in a few days just to make sure that everything is going okay, and I'll bring you some more tonics as well."

"Thanks, Craig." Mione hugged the healer tightly. "Especially for not listening to me when I asked you to help me get rid of him."

"You're welcome, Mione." Craig set her away from him. "Now I suggest you start doing as I say and lie down."

Tears tempering her voice, Mione lay on the bed once Craig had left, her hands cradling her stomach and stroking it, the feelings that she'd denied since she'd learnt about the baby, flooding through her. "Your mummy is so sorry that she said she didn't love you. She does very much. She was just upset, and she's going to do everything she can to make sure that you stay safe inside her tummy." Continuing to stroke her stomach, Mione went on. "You are so lucky, little one. You are going to have lots of Uncles and Aunts who will love you. But most of all, you're going to have a very special Daddy, and even though he and Mummy won't be married like other Mummies and Daddies, they'll both love you very much."

Remus startled her as he appeared in front of her. "I heard muffled talking through the wall, and I was worried about you."

Mione sat up. "I thought you'd gone back to sleep."

"I'd only just nodded back off, and wasn't properly asleep again." Remus sat down beside her. "What did Craig say about the baby?"

Mione took Remus' hand. "He's not in any danger but I do have to be careful, and try to rest up as much as possible. Craig said my body should have rejected him when he was conceived, and it's still giving it it's best shot now."

"Given your unique condition, I'm not really surprised." Remus began.

Mione smiled at him. "It isn't because of my condition. It's because of yours."

Remus immediately denied what Mione was insinuating. "He can't be mine. Werewolves..."

Mione interrupted him. "...supposedly can't have sons." She tutted. "Being an expert on werewolves I would have thought that you of all people would know that they only can't because a woman's body rejects male fetuses upon conception; something mine didn't."

Remus had read about it, and had just simply accepted that he would only ever have daughters. "He's really mine?"

Mione nodded tearfully. "He's really ours."

Mindful of what she'd said about resting up, Remus gently took Mione into his arms. "I would have loved him even if he'd been Thomas' son but to know that he's not means everything to me."

Mione couldn't hide her tears as she felt wetness that she knew wasn't from her touch her forehead. "I've been so awful, and I feel terrible that I wanted to get rid of him."

"You didn't know." Remus wiped his eyes as he sat up, and he grinned and changed the subject, not wanting Mione to dwell on the last few months. "Sirius is going to bust a gut when he finds out."

Mione laughed. "You want to tell him now, don't you?"

"Will you be alright on your own?" His exhaustion from the previous night melting away, Remus not only wanted to tell Sirius, he wanted to tell the world.

"I'll be fine. I can call Theresa if there's a problem." Mione assured him. "Go."

Remus kissed her cheek. "I won't be long."

After assuming a hurried glamour, Remus left, and Mione lay down with her hands on her stomach. "See, I told you your Daddy would love you, and he is special, and he loves us both so very much." Mione lowered her voice and whispered softly. "Mummy wishes she could love him back but she can't." Realizing she was going to cry again if she kept it up, Mione grabbed the book she'd started a few days earlier, and tried to pick up where she'd left off. Unfortunately the tears she'd hoped to avert blinded her to the writing.

The Ministry

Remus found Sirius in his office in the new Ministry buildings on Azkaban Island; Harry was also there making a report to him. Harry could feel his excitement immediately. "What's happened?"

"I'm going to be a father again." Remus announced.

Not connecting Mione's pregnancy with Remus, Harry shook hands with him. "Anna didn't mention that the two of you were back together again."

"That's because I ended things with her a while ago, Harry." Remus had explained to Anna what had happened with Mione in Castrum House, and they'd agreed, as they had before, to remain friends. This time, however, there were no last minute reprieves.

Sirius was pleased that Remus was going to be a father again, but not so happy about who the mother had to be. "So you're back together with Buffy?" He knew that Faith was harboring a hope that the two would patch things up, as she was aware that Buffy was still in love with Remus, and, like Xander, Faith preferred werewolves to Buffy's predilection for falling for vampires and demons. Sirius, however, still couldn't get along with the former slayer.

"No, Sirius." Remus could see Sirius trying to work out who it could be when he denied it was Buffy. "It's Mione who's expecting."

Harry was a little confused. "I don't mean to put a damper on your enthusiasm, but the baby she's expecting is a boy. How can it be yours? And you said that the two of you were just friends."

Remus explained about what had happened between him and Mione. "We were just trying to take comfort in each other. Given Mione's situation, and the fact that we thought we were going to die, we didn't even consider the possibility of Mione falling pregnant."

Harry had a question. "How does Mione feel about the baby now?"

Remus' face softened. "She's happy but she's also scared for the baby's sake given her own condition."

"Will you excuse me?" Harry left the room.

Sirius and Remus both knew where Harry had gone.

Birmingham

Harry found Mione in tears when Theresa let him into Mione's room. "I thought you'd be upset."

"I shouldn't be." Mione wiped her eyes with a tissue. "Especially now that I know that he isn't Thomas' baby."

"But it's hard isn't it, as you're not over Thomas yet, are you?" Harry closed the door behind him.

"I'm not." Mione sat down in the front room. "I hate Thomas more than I could have thought possible but I still miss him, Harry."

Harry noticed she didn't mention the word love. "I think time will change that."

"I hope so." Mione had lost track of how many nights she'd ended up in Remus' arms sobbing because of her estranged husband, and how guilty she felt because of it.

Harry could feel her guilt, but he didn't say anything else about it. "And what about Remus? How do you feel about him?"

"I don't honestly know what I'd do without him." Mione was also wracked with guilt about how dependent she'd become on Remus.

"Do you think there's any chance for the two of you?" Harry asked hopefully.

"I don't know, Harry." Mione twisted the hankie in her hand. "I literally gave my heart and soul to Thomas, and I'm not sure I've got anything else left to offer anyone else, even to someone whose baby I'm carrying and who I care about." Mione put her hand over her stomach.

"And how do you feel about the baby now?" Harry didn't miss the protective gesture.

Gently rubbing her stomach, Mione looked ashamed. "I love him, Harry. I think I did even when I thought he was Thomas' son, but you have no idea how glad I am that he isn't, especially given what happened between us."

Harry's face darkened as he was reminded of what Mione had gone through. "It's still not a pleasant time that he was conceived during though."

Mione disagreed. "You're wrong, Harry. This baby may have been conceived in a prison cell but his conception was a memory I'll always cherish, and I'll be able to tell him he was conceived in love." Mione gave a rueful smile. "Because even though I don't feel the same way about Remus as he does about me, I do love him."

Having seen the two of them when they'd thought they were being taken away to die, Harry wasn't surprised at her comment. "Mione, I know Remus will take good care of you but despite the fact that I'm married to Cass, I do still love you, and if there's anything you ever need, I'll be there for you."

Mione's eyes filled with even more tears as she knew, in the same way that a small part of her heart would always belong to Harry, a small part of his was hers as well. "I love you too, Harry."

Harry hugged his former wife and gently kissed her on the tip of her nose. "Now I do believe you're supposed to be taking things easy."

"I am." Mione promised Harry, as she grabbed his arm when he went to straighten up. "Harry, I haven't talked this through with Remus yet, but would you and Cassandra consider being our son's godparents?"

Harry was touched. "Talk it through with Remus first, and if he agrees, then yes, we'd love to."

"Good." Mione yawned and lay down. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." Harry turned as the door opened and Remus came in. "I'm just going."

"You don't have to." Remus didn't want to push Harry out.

"I know but I have things I need to be doing." Harry held out his hand. "Congratulations again."

"Thanks." Remus shook Harry's hand, before closing the door behind him. "How are you feeling?"

"Happy, frightened, nervous, exhausted." Mione smiled. "It's hard to explain."

Remus yawned and sat down on the side of the bed. "I'm going to be here for you."

"I know, Remus." Mione patted the bed. "You can start by getting some sleep. You're starting to droop."

"The initial euphoria wore off." Remus kicked off his shoes, picked Mione up and pulled back the covers, before replacing her on the bed. "You look tired as well, so you too can get some sleep."

"I didn't sleep well last night. I was worried about the test results." Mione curled up to Remus' chest after he shed his shirt and removed his belt from his trousers, before lying down beside her.

"You can stop worrying now." Remus kissed her forehead. "Craig will monitor you, and everything's going to be alright."

"Everything will only be alright when I get my daughter back." Mione had received Thomas' response from his lawyers, and she'd agreed that the case could take place in Sydney since she wanted to be free of Thomas in the Muggle world if nothing else. However, she had never thought of using the court case to entrap Thomas, no matter what he'd believed.

"You realize that Thomas has a chance of gaining custody of all three children now?" Remus didn't want to upset Mione but he also wanted her to be realistic.

"An outside chance." Mione reminded him of what her lawyer had said. "It's more likely that it will come down to joint custody."

"You're not afraid he'll try and keep the children?" Remus stroked Mione's hair as he asked.

"Sarah said that he'll have to swear an oath after the court case, as will I, that we'll return the children at the appointed time." Mione had employed a wizarding lawyer who was au fait with the Muggle system, and she had consulted a lawyer in their Sydney branch to deal with the technicalities there. "We're both also going to have to swear oaths not to interfere in any way with the officiators who will be dealing with the case, as they're Muggles and can easily be manipulated."

"I was listening, Mione." Remus reminded her that he'd been with her.

"Sorry, I wasn't thinking." Mione apologized. "I'm just completely off-kilter at the moment."

"It's not surprising." Remus again kissed Mione's forehead. "Now I think we both should get some sleep."

"I think you're right." Mione closed her eyes, and within a few minutes both she and Remus were asleep.

1st March 2012

Thomas handed the piece of paper back to Regulus. "You're right; it is Cammie's magical signature but I have a bad feeling about this."

Regulus paced the floor. "I'm going, Thomas."

"Then I'll go with you." Thomas offered.

Regulus shook his head. "You can't. The court case is the same day."

"Which makes me believe it's a trap being set by Sebastian." Thomas frowned. "But that would also mean that Sebastian wouldn't be able to monitor the court case, and I can't believe that he'd just leave Mione to my tender mercies."

Regulus agreed. "Which is why I don't think it is a trap. Perhaps Cammie picked this date because she knows Sebastian won't be there."

Thomas still felt uneasy, and brought up another point. "Reg, this house is in a Muggle area. If Cammie can get out, then why hasn't she caught a taxi and come here?"

"What if they've done something to her Dark Mark. You know as well I do that they can do it." Regulus counterpointed Thomas' argument. "She wouldn't get through the wards of this place alive, and she'd never risk our son to try it. And I can hardly lower the wards with Maddie staying here so often." Thomas had tied Maddie into the wards to ensure that the wards didn't affect her.

"I'm not going to be able to talk you out of this, am I?" Thomas, however, had known that he'd had to try.

"No, you're not." Regulus was going after Cammie no matter what his friend said.

"In that case be careful." Thomas warned.

"I will." Regulus grinned. "And if I'm not, then you can come and rescue me."

"Now that would be walking into a trap." Thomas observed.

"In that case, then you'll walk away." Regulus didn't want Thomas risking himself for him.

Thomas pulled out an ever present ring from his pocket and tapped it. "If it is a trap but Cammie hasn't manufactured it, then try and give her this. It's a portkey that will bring her to the Island. She should hopefully know the activation code."

"Thanks." Regulus pocketed the portkey, and changed the subject. "How are things going with Lucy?"

"She's bloody brilliant." Thomas briefly told Regulus about the changes Lucy had implemented.

"I bet you didn't think you find someone as clever as Mione to take up with." Regulus poured both him and Thomas scotches.

"I'm not involved with Lucy." Thomas knew what his friend thought. "And Lucy, even though she is talented, isn't in Mione's league intelligence wise. Lucy is as clever as Mione when it comes to figures but she lacks Mione's intuitiveness and analytical skills."

"And how do you feel about Mione now?" Regulus sat down.

"I don't love her anymore, if that's what you're asking." Thomas' feelings had faded away, the anger he felt towards his wife overriding anything else. "But I do miss her."

"I can understand that." Regulus felt as if part of him was missing with Cammie gone.

"It's different, Reg." Thomas smiled ruefully. "And I hope for your sake that this isn't a trap."

"So do I, my friend, so do I." Regulus remarked.

Next Chapter: The court case; Regulus finds out whether Thomas' suspicions were right; Lucy encounters Harry Sebastian.

Chapter 78: Entrapment

March 10th 2012

Thomas was sitting thinking about Lucy and what Regulus had said a few days earlier, while he watched his daughter and Lucy playing together in the pool. Missing a female in her life, Maddie had latched onto Lucy almost immediately after the first time Lucy had looked after her. Since then Lucy had tended to work from Thomas' homes unless he needed her in the office, and Maddie had ended up spending most of her time in Lucy's company, usually content to read a book as Lucy worked.

It had been Maddie who had requested that Lucy accompany them to Santa Barbara on vacation, before they flew to Sydney for the court case. As Thomas had work for Lucy to do, he'd intended to take Lucy along anyway. And, as Thomas had told Regulus, even though Lucy still professed to hating him, she'd was already shaping up into the best assistant he'd ever hired. As he turned his thoughts away from Lucy, Thomas almost choked on his beer as he heard his daughter ask Lucy a question, and he listened carefully for Lucy's response.

Lucy knew exactly how to answer Maddie's question. "Well, I'm a girl but I'm not really your Dad's friend because I work for him, so the answer would be no, I'm not your Dad's girlfriend."

Maddie had started to call Thomas 'Dad' after she'd watched a reality TV program when she'd shared a Muggle hotel room in San Francisco with Lucy, and Lucy had remarked that only silly little rich girls called their fathers 'Daddy'. When she'd seen Maddie's face, Lucy had immediately backtracked telling Maddie that it was okay at her age to do so, but Maddie was determined that Lucy wouldn't think her silly.

"I wouldn't mind if you were." Maddie didn't realize that Thomas was listening to everything she said. "Dad is lonely, and Mum has someone else now."

Lucy, on the other hand, was only too well aware of Thomas listening to their conversation. "Your Dad doesn't need a girlfriend. He's got you to keep him company."

"But it's not the same." Maddie argued. "And you already spend lots of time with him."

"I spend lots of time with your Dad because I'm his assistant." Lucy pointed out.

Maddie still hadn't realized that she was being listened to. "Are you sure you don't want to be Dad's girlfriend?"

"Quite sure." Lucy assured her. "Anyway, I'm not your Dad's type."

"Why not?" Maddie wasn't quite ready to give up on the subject.

"I'm too rude to him, and not very ladylike." Lucy couldn't say that Thomas would consider her a half-breed.

"No-one is ever rude to Dad." Maddie had seen how people treated her father.

"Lucy is." Thomas finally joined in the conversation. "Quite often."

"Dad, you do like Luce even though she's rude to you?" Maddie loved Lucy and wanted to make sure that her father liked the girl she considered her best friend.

"Very much." Thomas told her. "And she's wrong about her not being my type."

Maddie's face lit up as she understood what Thomas was saying. "Why don't you take her out to dinner then, Dad?"

Lucy wanted to sink beneath the water and never come up again. "You can't ask him to do that, Maddie."

"I think it's a good idea." Thomas checked the time. "In fact, I'll take you both out to dinner."

Maddie was thrilled by his suggestion, and began to pull Lucy out of the pool. "I'll help you pick out something to wear."

"Thanks, Maddie." Lucy glared at Thomas as Maddie dragged her by him.

An hour later

Maddie twirled around. "Do I look nice, Dad?"

"You always look nice, Maddie." Thomas was used to his daughter fishing for compliments.

"Does Luce look nice?" Maddie waited eagerly for Thomas' comment.

"She looks good enough to eat." Thomas hid his smile at Lucy's scowl at his response.

"And do you think Dad looks nice, Luce?" Maddie turned to face Lucy, just missing the angry look Lucy had given her father.

"Your Dad is wearing a very nice outfit." Lucy refused to say that Thomas himself looked nice. She picked up her wrap. "Where are we going?"

"Downey's." Thomas named what he considered to be the best restaurant in Santa Barbara. "They have the most divine duck I've ever tasted."

All through dinner, Maddie plastered both her father and Lucy with questions. When Maddie excused herself to go the bathroom, Lucy hissed angrily at Thomas. "Your daughter is matchmaking. Do you think that you could stop her? I don't exactly want to have to tell her that I don't like you."

"It's just harmless fun." Thomas thought it amusing that Lucy was so worked up about Maddie's obvious ploy. "I don't know why you're so upset by it. It's not as if you find me attractive."

"Damn right, I don't." Lucy got to her feet. "If you'll excuse me."

Maddie came back to the table, passing Lucy on the way. "Dad, why was Luce's face red?"

"You'd have to ask her." Thomas was only too well aware that Maddie was likely to do so. "Maddie, you like Lucy, don't you?"

Maddie nodded. "She's fun, and she doesn't get cross even if I bother her when she's working."

Thomas knew that both he and Mione had been guilty of doing that. "Would you like it if I asked her out on a date?"

"Yes." Maddie's face told Thomas that his daughter more than liked the idea. "When?"

Thomas spotted Lucy coming back. "Soon. This is between us for the moment, okay?"

"Okay." Maddie spent what was left of the night with a secretive grin on her face.

When they got back home, Lucy frowned as Maddie kissed her and yelling goodnight, skipped off, foregoing her usual request to stay up for ten minutes more. "She was in a hurry to get to bed."

"Probably just tired." Thomas knew exactly why his daughter had fled.

Not wanting to be alone with Thomas, Lucy also made her excuses. "I think I'll head off to bed as well."

Thomas decided he could wait, and bid her goodnight.

Two days later

Lucy opened her eyes to find Maddie on her bed. "Wha' time is it?"

"Five." Maddie jumped up and down. "Get up, Luce. I want to go to the park."

"It doesn't open until nine." Lucy closed her eyes. "Go back to sleep."

"Then I want to go for a swim first." Maddie lifted one of Lucy's eyelids. "Please?"

When Thomas walked into the sitting room an hour later, he found a note from Lucy telling him they'd gone for a walk, as Lucy had refused pointblank to swim, and that they'd meet him at the entrance to Disneyland at nine, as Lucy had her own portkey.

After spending the morning in Disneyland and having lunch, the trio headed into the second park that Disney owned. Maddie was delighted by Soarin' and had even forced Thomas to ride it. After the second time, however, he put his foot down. "That's it, Maddie. There are other things to see."

Lucy found herself walking with Thomas when Maddie dashed on ahead. "She's really enjoying this, isn't she?"

"And you're not?" Thomas had thought Lucy had been almost as excited as his daughter.

Lucy waved at Maddie as she pointed to a store and went inside. "I love things like this. Muggles have managed to create something we never have, and in here I can pretend that the world outside doesn't exist."

"Is your life really that bad?" Thomas walked through the automatic doors, and spotted Maddie picking up stuffed toys.

"It's certainly not the life of my dreams." Lucy started to head over to Maddie. "But I can't deny that I like spending time in Maddie's company."

"How about my company?" Thomas asked just before they reached Maddie.

"I'm sure Maddie loves it." Lucy avoided answering the question, and she smiled brightly at Maddie. "What have you found?"

"It's a dinosaur that roars. Can I have it, please?" Maddie looked hopefully at her father.

Lucy answered instead. "I'll buy it for you on the way out." She held out her hand. "Let's go on some more rides first."

Thomas had little choice but to follow the two of them out of the store and towards yet another ride.

Later that evening

After the excitement of the day, Maddie had barely been able to stay awake during dinner, and as soon as they portkeyed back to the Santa Barbara apartment Thomas had rented, she went to bed.

"I'm tired as well." Lucy put down her bags. "I'm going to take a leaf out of Maddie's book and head off to bed."

"Coward." Thomas watched a furious look appear on Lucy's face.

"Hardly." Lucy stood with her hands on her hips. "If I was a coward then I wouldn't have stood up to you at the Ministry, and all the times since then."

"You stand up to me because you're very well aware that unless you push me too far I'm not going to hurt you." Thomas took Lucy's hand. "And at the Ministry it's because you were running on adrenalin, and we both know that this situation is very different, since you weren't worried about being kissed in the Ministry."

Lucy's stomach flopped over. "Should I be worried about it now?"

"Yes." Thomas could see that he'd finally found a way to unnerve her. "I've wanted to kiss you all day."

Lucy didn't believe him. "You don't even like me."

"I've liked you ever since I ran into you at the Ministry." Thomas tightened his grip on Lucy's hand when she went to pull away. "In fact,

when I saw you standing over Greyback with that chair in your hand and your eyes blazing, that was when I first wanted to kiss you."

"I find that hard to believe." Lucy found her other hand being taken as well. "You'd only just found about Mione then."

"It doesn't mean that I wasn't attracted to you." Thomas tugged her closer to him. "Not that I would have acted on it then. As you've just pointed out, it was too soon after what happened with Mione. But it's been three months now, and I've decided that as my wife has moved on, why shouldn't I?"

"But I'm a half-breed." Lucy threw Thomas' own words about werewolves in his face.

"I don't see you that way." Thomas wrapped his arms around Lucy's waist.

"It still doesn't change what I am now." Lucy could feel her mouth drying up as one of Thomas' hand moved up her back to cradle her neck.

"No, it doesn't, but that still doesn't stop me from wanting to do this." Thomas then kissed her.

As the kiss ended, Lucy pulled free of his hold. "I'm not sleeping with you."

"That's quite a jump from a kiss to my bed. But don't worry; I know you're not ready for that." Thomas held out his hand. "Come with me."

Lucy let him take her hand. "Where are we going?"

"Just for a walk. I want to talk to you." Thomas set up wards to alert him if there was a problem with Maddie, before leading Lucy down the stairs to the beach.

"What do you want to talk about?" Lucy removed her sandals as she began to sink into the soft sand.

"Us." Thomas pulled off his own shoes and socks as well.

"There is no us." Lucy dropped her sandals on the lowest step of the stairway.

"I'd like there to be." Thomas took Lucy's hand again, and began to lead her up the beach.

"I think it's a bad idea." Lucy shivered as the chilly water washed over her bare feet.

Thomas tugged her out of reach of the water. "Why?"

"There are a thousand and one reasons why." Lucy protested.

"Name five." Thomas challenged her.

"I can do one better. You're married; you still love your wife; you're Dominus; I hate what you're doing; I work for you; and you've ruined my life." Lucy listed six reasons quite easily.

"I'm shortly about to rid myself of Muggle marriage, and if I had any way of undoing my wizarding marriage I would." Thomas dismissed her first reason.

"And what about the other reasons?" Lucy reminded him that there were five other reasons she'd come up with.

"I don't love Mione anymore. But I did right up until the night I found out she was living with Lupin when Maddie ran from her." Thomas admitted that his feelings hadn't ended straightaway.

"You could have fooled me. I've seen your face when you talk about her." Lucy thought she was pretty good at reading people now that she was a werewolf, even though she couldn't actually feel any emotions coming from Thomas. "And I think you're still in love with her."

"I'm not. I do miss her but I don't love her anymore. When Maddie said that they were living with Lupin it was the final nail in the coffin so to speak." Thomas could still remember the sinking feeling in his stomach when Remus had held Mione in his arms on the Muggle street.

"Okay, so I was wrong about that, but you can't change my final reasons." Lucy quite rightly pointed out.

"I can't change that I am Dominus, and I'm not changing what I'm doing, not for anyone. And I am sorry that you think that I've ruined your life, even though I don't believe that it's that bad for you right now." Thomas dealt with all three reasons, before shooting down Lucy's final reason. "And as for working for me, I don't see it as a problem, so neither should you." Thomas then challenged Lucy. "Now I have a question for you, little spitfire. Why did you kiss me back this evening if you're not interested?"

Lucy avoided the question, and came back with one of her own. "Why do you call me little spitfire?"

"I call you spitfire because you remind me of a kitten that's had its fur brushed the wrong way." Thomas smiled at her. "All fire and indignation as you show your outrage, and you're not very tall, hence the little. Now answer my original question."

Lucy lied to him outright. "I know how nasty you can get if you don't get what you want."

"You're lying, Lucy." Thomas stopped walking. "You refused to take the Dark Mark, even when I threatened your life, so on a scale of one to ten, I'd say that refusing to kiss me would rank as a one. So tell me the truth."

Lucy still avoided the question. "Tell me first why, apart from that night at the Ministry, you've never punished me. You threaten me but you never follow through, although I have to admit I think that sometimes it's only because Reg has stepped in."

"I like that you'll stand up to me, and yes, those times Reg has stepped in has been when you've driven me close to losing my temper. However, I find your attitude refreshing, and as you've given me your word that you'll never attack me unless invited to do so, I won't hit out at you. Particularly as it almost seems sacrilegious to attack one of the few people who I genuinely like and who has the gumption to stand up to me." Thomas sat down a rock. "Now that's out of the way I want an answer to my question as to why you kissed me back."

"Simple curiosity." Lucy answered a little more truthfully this time.

Thomas was satisfied with her response. "Now that we've been honest, I want to know if you're interested in pursuing a relationship with me."

Lucy didn't refuse him outright. "And if I'm not?"

"Then just tell me." Thomas answered as if it was the logical assumption. "I won't hold it against you."

Lucy responded to him in her usual recalcitrant manner. "I wouldn't care if you did."

Thomas stared up at Lucy. "Does that mean that you're not interested then?"

"It means exactly that." Lucy waited for Thomas' reaction.

"Then I'll say goodnight." Thomas got up. "And I'll see you in the morning for breakfast."

"Okay." Lucy was a little taken aback that he hadn't got annoyed, and now didn't know exactly what to make of his reaction. "I'm going to stay out here a little longer."

"Be careful." Thomas warned.

"I think people have more to fear from me than the other way around." Lucy reminded him that she could take care of herself. "I'll

see you tomorrow." When she glanced around at the almost imperceptible crack, she found that Thomas had vanished. In the dark she could just see him in the distance picking up his shoes before climbing the steps and disappearing from view.

March 15th 2012

Sydney (Local time: 2pm UK time: 3am)

Unsurprised to find the media waiting at the courthouse, Thomas, Lucy, and Jim Duggan entered the building, all of them ignoring the questions that were being thrown at them. All parties believed that it would be little more than a formality as both lawyers had already come to an agreement as to custody of the children and the terms of the divorce. Thomas and Mione had also exchanged brief notes stating that they'd both swear an oath to each other not to keep the children when their period of custody ended, as both of them knew that neither one would return the children otherwise. Thomas' face tightened reflexively when he spotted his wife as they entered the courtroom. Lucy stopped him, and spoke quietly to him. "Can we talk outside for a minute?"

"I'll be there in a moment, Jim." Thomas spoke quickly to his lawyer who'd hesitated when he'd realized that Thomas had stopped following him, before Thomas led Lucy back outside of the courtroom. "What is it?"

"You didn't know she was pregnant, did you?" Lucy said quietly.

"I didn't even think it was possible for her to get pregnant." Thomas had thought he was over Mione, but seeing her like that had still been like a kick in the gut. Thomas looked over his shoulder back in through the window to the courtroom.

"Right now you need to focus." Lucy reached up and turned Thomas' head to face her. "Even though this is pretty much just a formality, remember what Jim Duggan said. The judge can still change her mind and go against what has been decided, especially if you display enmity towards either your wife or her partner. And you've sworn not to interfere with the Judge's decision."

"I still sometimes find it hard to believe that you aren't afraid to take me to task. Not even Reg is always willing to push his luck with me like you do." Thomas smiled at his assistant. "But I'm glad that you keep me in line. We'd better go in."

Once inside the court and seated in the front row behind Thomas, Lucy was conscious that Remus was studying her. She turned and gave him a smile acknowledging him; letting him know that she was aware of exactly what he was, even though she couldn't detect it. Remus returned the same calculating smile.

Returning her attention to the man in front of her, Lucy knew that Thomas was actually nervous about the upcoming decision even though he didn't show it on his face. She, like everyone else, listened as the Judge granted the divorce petition as it stood. Then she began to sum up the matter of the children's custody before revealing her decision; a decision neither party had expected.

The upshot of the decision was that Nat would remain in Mione's care for the better part of the year due to his special needs, and the fact that he was already doing well in the private school Remus had found for him; something that Thomas hadn't even been aware of happening until it had appeared in the papers when Mione had countersued him for full custody of the children. Thomas would therefore have custody of Nat for one weekend per month, and certain weeks during the year. Bella had been clear cut and joint custody had been awarded as per the original agreement.

Lucy could see the tension in Thomas' shoulders as the Judge finally reached Maddie. The Judge remarked that in Maddie's case, after questioning the young girl and reading the psychologist's report, she'd taken Maddie's feelings into consideration when coming to a decision. Maddie had been vehement in her desire to live with Thomas, as well as citing Lucy as someone she also loved and trusted. Working so closely with Thomas and having an interest in Maddie's care, Lucy had found herself being interviewed for the case.

The decision however, had mostly been influenced by Maddie's marked reluctance to live with Mione and Remus, stating she'd run

away again if she had to. The Judge had therefore altered the agreement so that Maddie would only spend two weekends a month with Remus and Mione. Judge Jermaine could see that Mione was visibly upset, and she had gently told her that it was in the child's best interests, before outlining the first few instances of custody.

Thomas was delighted, especially as he knew that Mione had been restricted by the laws on revealing magic to Muggles, and that Mione had therefore been unable to use the most damning evidence she could. Hence the Judge had no idea as to who Thomas really was, nor the danger that Mione believed Maddie to be in. And as both parties had sworn not to interfere with any of the decisions or try to sway or influence the Judge in any way, there was now nothing Mione could do about it, except abide by the Judge's ruling.

After letting out a sigh of relief, Thomas walked over to Lucy. "I need to sort out swearing this final oath with Mione, but wait for me outside, okay?"

"I will." Lucy rose to her feet and headed out, aware that Remus was behind her. As they left the court room, Mione and Thomas stepped into a side room with their lawyers to swear their oaths out of the public eye, leaving Lucy standing by Remus, and she turned to face him. "So you're Remus Lupin."

"And you're the infamous Lucy Viking." Remus responded. "And you're a werewolf, aren't you?"

"So are you." Lucy countered. "What of it?"

"Seville considers us half-breeds." Remus found himself studying the girl who had once been on their side. "So why are you with him?"

Lucy didn't bother to say that she wasn't, and let Remus believe differently. "It's none of your business, but I do believe that it's only people like you that he feels that way about." Lucy might not have been able to detect that Remus was a werewolf, but she could feel the enmity for her coming from him. "It's certainly not me."

Remus tried another tack. "He didn't wait long to replace Mione."

"That's a case of the pot and kettle black, isn't it, Lupin, especially as I see that Mione is pregnant." Lucy used Mione's condition to hit back. "And just so you know, I don't see a problem with Thomas' moving on. It wasn't him who cheated first."

Thomas' voice stopped any further discourse. "Little spitfire, are you ready?"

"Yes, I do believe I am." Lucy deliberately slid her own arm around Thomas' waist, aware that it would irk Remus. She smiled coldly when Thomas put his arm across her shoulders. "Lupin, I can't say that it's been a pleasure, and I certainly hope we don't meet again."

"Likewise, Viking." Remus was as cold with his response as Lucy had been in giving hers. Both he and Thomas pointedly ignored each other.

After discreetly invoking a 'notice-me-not' spell to avoid the Muggle media, Thomas led Lucy away, only to encounter a familiar face standing at the bottom of the steps to the courthouse. "Afraid I was going to upset the applecart, Sebastian? I noticed your men surrounding the courthouse."

Being a werewolf and able to ignore the spell, Thomas' exit hadn't gone unnoticed by Harry as it had everyone else. "I wasn't willing to take the chance that you wouldn't cause trouble. And I couldn't help but notice your men as well, even if they aren't wearing their usual party favors."

"But you're not going to start a fight in a place like this though, are you?" Thomas challenged Harry. "There are far too many innocent civilians around, and you don't have any jurisdiction, do you?"

"I know you spoke to the Minister to stop me from being here in an official capacity, but don't think you're going to get away with what you've done, Seville." Harry warned. "By the time this is over, I intend to see that you end up in New Azkaban along with your new girlfriend. We have a couple of cells with your names on them. Not that either of you will be in them for that long."

Lucy recoiled at the venom in Harry's voice. "You've got to catch me first, Sir."

The 'Sir' was anything but polite. "Oh I will, Viking, believe me, I will. You of all people should know that." Harry then turned and headed up the steps to join Mione and Remus.

"You were quick swearing the oath." Lucy noted as Harry walked off.

"I didn't want to be in the same room with Mione any longer than I had to be." Thomas led the way to the car that was waiting for them. Once inside, Thomas asked after Lucy's state of mind. "I know how tough you act, but are you okay? I saw the look on your face when Sebastian warned you."

"Yes." Lucy fastened her seatbelt. "But it's hard to deal with the fact that someone I used to idolize now hates me."

"You were attracted to him, weren't you?" Thomas had often seen Lucy's face soften when she talked about Harry. He told the driver to take them to the airport.

"Yes, for a while, and even though I knew that it would never come to anything, that didn't stop me measuring everyone else against Harry." Lucy revealed how she'd felt about her former boss, before briskly changing the subject. "But that's neither here nor there. I currently don't exactly have time for a private life, not with the work I do now."

"You're not alone." Thomas pulled out the papers he'd brought with him to work on. "The second folder is for you."

"Thanks." Lucy took the folder and began work until they reached the airport where a private helicopter was waiting for them.

Thomas turned to Lucy once they'd entered the helicopter. "Why did you defend me at the courthouse against Lupin?"

"He didn't only attack you, he also attacked me." Lucy told Thomas exactly what Remus had said. "I was angry and didn't see that it was any of his business what you were doing."

"So you didn't do it because you've changed your mind about a relationship with me?" Thomas ran his fingers down Lucy's cheekbones.

"I've already said I'm not interested." Lucy, however, didn't pull away.

"I don't believe you." And to prove himself right, Thomas lifted both hands to entangle them in Lucy's hair before lowering his mouth to kiss her.

As the kiss ended, Lucy met Thomas' gaze. "Don't you ever give up?"

Thomas shook his head. "I wouldn't have gotten where I am today if I'd stopped at the first hurdle. If I want something, then I tend to go after it until I get it."

"You should know that this is one time where persistence won't pay off." Lucy pulled away from him when she felt a bump. "We've landed."

"Let's go tell my parents the good news." Thomas wasn't put off by Lucy's continued refusal to date him, and took her hand to help her out of the helicopter, before leading her up the pathway that led to the large Colonial style home.

Grand Hotel, Manchester: (Local time: 7.30am Sydney 6.30pm)

Cammie waited patiently for Luna to arrive for breakfast; she was excited to be seeing her as she hadn't yet seen Luna's newborn son. Even though she wasn't usually allowed out of the house, she'd jumped at the chance to meet up with Luna when Harry had told her that Luna had mentioned that she'd like to see Cammie. He'd then offered to provide her with a portkey to take her to meet Luna, as long she gave Harry her word that she wouldn't attempt to escape from the hotel. When the door opened Cammie stood up, a smile on her face, only for it to slide away as she saw who was there. "Reg?"

Regulus strode into the room and took her into his arms, devouring her mouth. He was stunned when she struggled to pull free. "Cam, what's wrong?"

"What are you doing here?" Cammie asked frantically.

"I got a note with your magical signature on it." Regulus heard footsteps behind him, but he didn't look back.

"I don't know anything about a note." Cammie went white as she saw who had just walked in behind Regulus. "I thought I was supposed to be meeting Luna for breakfast."

"Hello, Amicus." Sirius was leaning in the doorway, his wand drawn. "I'm so glad you could join us."

Regulus still didn't turn around. "You tricked me?"

Cammie shook her head, the truth easy to see. "I swear I didn't know."

"I believe you." Only then did Regulus finally turn around. "Minister, what an unpleasant surprise."

"Sit down." Sirius ordered. "And I want your wands. Try anything stupid, and I won't hesitate to kill you." Regulus unholstered his wands and handed them over to his brother, unwilling to risk a firefight with Cammie in the room, and he could also see the large entourage of Aurors standing just outside of the room.

Cammie could do nothing but stare disbelievingly at Sirius as she finally realized what note Regulus had received. "Uncle Harry used me."

"I'm sorry." Sirius was aware that Harry had had Cammie write down the time and place of the meeting. "But the note had to be authentic."

Cammie shook her head in dismay, and edged towards the wall just as Hermione walked into the room, Sirius having told his men to let her through. "What's going on?"

"How could you, Mum? You of all people know how I feel about Reg." Cammie was beginning to feel trapped. "And was Luna in on it?"

Sirius defended both women. "Luna doesn't even have any idea about this meeting even taking place, and I asked your mother to join for me for breakfast on the pretence that it was to discuss a lead we had that I needed her help on."

Hermione spotted how pale her daughter was, and pushing past Sirius, placed her arm around Cammie's shoulders before turning on him. "You bastard. Did you even consider what this would do to Cammie when you were planning this?"

Sirius could see how pale Cammie had gone. "Yes, that's why you're here. I thought Cammie would need you when I arrested Regulus."

Regulus didn't dare move, his brother's warning ringing in his ears. "I think you should sit her down."

Cammie was now completely bereft of all color and starting to sway. Hermione hustled her daughter into the chair next to Regulus, pushing Cammie's head between her legs. "Breathe."

Cammie fought the black dots that had been dancing in her vision and soon felt better. Lifting her head up, she glared at Sirius. "I hate you."

Sirius exhaled with regret. "Hermione, please take her out of here."

Aware that this was probably the last time he'd see her, Regulus completely ignored Sirius' prior warning, uncaring about what he did to him now, and cradled Cammie's face in his hands.

Cammie mimicked Regulus, placing her hands on his face, and pulled him towards her, her lips seeking his.

As the kiss ended, Regulus looked deep into Cammie's eyes. "I love you."

Cammie felt as though her world had ended, knowing what lay ahead for Regulus. "I'll always love you."

Regulus closed his eyes momentarily, almost overcome with emotion, and he grasped Cammie's hand for a moment, before letting it go. "Take care of yourself and our son."

Cammie couldn't say anything else as she started to cry. Sirius nodded towards the door. "Hermione, you'd better take her out."

As Hermione gently led Cammie outside of the room, the Aurors headed inside. Cammie gave a strangled sob, her face freezing when she spotted the man coming towards them. H.J. went to apologize to his daughter. "Cam..."

"Don't ever speak to me again." Cammie interrupted H.J., and then pulled away from her mother and stalked off, tears almost blinding her as she stumbled out of the exit.

H.J. turned to Hermione. "I had to, Hermione. Try and explain it to her."

"How can I, H.J.?" Hermione snarled. "When I don't even understand myself how you could do this to her."

"He's Seville's closest ally and this was the only way." H.J. tried defending himself. "With Seville out of the country, we weren't going to get another chance like this again."

"For once, I don't give a shit about Seville. My daughter is my main concern, unlike yours." Hermione glared at her husband before following Cammie out through the exit.

Outside, Mione found that Cammie was looking over the parapet that surrounded the twentieth floor Muggle restaurant. "How could they have used me like that, Mum? They're as bad as Thomas."

Hermione felt terrible for her daughter. "I don't know, and I'm sorry."

Cammie didn't look at Hermione, her voice becoming distant. "Have you seen the movie Dracula?"

Hermione was totally thrown by Cammie's question. "No, I haven't. Why?"

"Vengeful Turks shot an arrow with a note into the castle telling Princess Elisabetta that her husband was dead." Cammie could see the scene playing over in her mind.

"And what happened?" Hermione was suddenly afraid for her daughter.

"She threw herself off a tower into a deep river to her death." Cammie gave a tiny sob. "The note Uncle Harry used against me may as well have been the same thing."

It was now Hermione's turn to go white as she realized how high up they were. "Cammie, come away from the wall."

Cammie gave a small but bitter laugh. "I'm not going to jump, Mum." She placed a hand over her rounded stomach. "I would never do anything to hurt my baby."

Hermione couldn't believe she thought for one moment that Cammie would, and she returned to the subject of the film. "Is that how the movie ended?"

"No." Cammie smiled bitterly. "Dracula found peace and was reunited with his bride in Muggle heaven."

Hermione sighed. "I'm sorry you aren't going to get the happy ending you deserve. And I'm sorry that H.J. did this."

"Do you know that apart from Luna and Reg, you're the only person I trust in this world?" Cammie smiled sadly. "I love Dad but I no longer trust him."

"Cammie, he's only doing what he believes is the right thing." Hermione defended her husband, even though she didn't agree with what he'd done.

"Would you have agreed to this if you'd known?" Cammie asked quietly.

"No." Hermione shook her head. "I believe in telling the truth."

"Then apart from you and Luna, there's only one other person I know who also believes in it." Cammie watched as a Muggle aircraft flew overhead, before staring at her mother.

"Thomas?" Hermione couldn't think of who else Cammie meant.

"Yes." Cammie continued to follow the plane's journey with her eyes. "How is it that the one man who believes in truth is the one man who can destroy our world?"

"I don't know, Cammie." Hermione held out her hand. "Come on. Let's go home."

Grief stricken, Cammie lacklusterly followed her mother.

Sutton Hotel, Sydney (Local time 7.15pm UK time: 8:15am)

Harry and Mione sat across from each other in the suite that Remus and Mione were staying in. "You look awfully pale, Mione. Do you want me to arrange for a healer to see you?"

"No, Harry. I'm just a little tired, and still reeling from the fact that swearing that oath today actually hurt me." Mione had been beyond shocked when pain had ripped through her.

"I think it confirms our theory that one of our friendly Fates must have tampered with your ring." Harry was still confused though. "But shouldn't swearing the previous oaths not to tamper with the officials at the courthouse have hurt?"

"I didn't swear them; my lawyer did it on my behalf because I'm pregnant, and was in danger of losing the baby." Mione lifted up the glass she was drinking from. "But I had to swear my own oath today as these concoctions I'm drinking, and the blood balancing spells that Craig found, have made all the difference. He's still continuing the anti-rejection spells but he believes that I'm now not in any more danger than a normal mother would be."

"That's nice to hear." Harry could sense how relaxed Mione was now when she talked about her unborn son. "How tough was it seeing Thomas?"

"It was more strange than anything else to be truthful." Mione had expected to be afraid; instead she'd been filled with loathing at the sight of Thomas. "I'm not sure how I'm going to do tomorrow though when I have to take the children to stay with him."

"I'll be going with you." Harry informed her. "Seville won't like it, but I'm not letting you go alone. Remus accompanying you would be too inflammatory."

"Thanks." Mione span around as the fireplace began to ping. "I wonder who that can be. Remus can't have tracked down Dr. Sororean yet."

Harry walked over to the fireplace and touched the panel. "Yes?"

"Commander Sebastian, I'm sorry to bother you but I thought you'd like to know that the arrest was successful." A head floating in the fireplace told Harry.

"Any casualties?" Harry knew what had been planned.

"None, Sir." The head informed him. "He's being held in Location B until his trial tomorrow."

"Tell the Minister I'll join him shortly." Harry then ended the call, feeling Mione's surprise. "We haven't arrested Thomas if that's what

you're thinking. But we set things up to take Black out while Thomas was otherwise occupied."

"How?" Mione was stunned.

Harry told her of the planned sting. "Unfortunately I had to use Cammie, and I feel bad about it, but I was banking on the fact that Black wouldn't risk Cammie or their son by trying to fight his way out."

"Hermione's going to be furious." Mione warned him. "You know how protective she's become of Cammie."

"I think I can deal with Hermione." Harry did experience a pang of guilt though. He didn't get a chance to say much more as Remus apparated in with an elderly gentleman. "That was quick."

"I got lucky." Remus helped his companion to sit down. "Dr. Sororean, you probably remember Mione."

"Of course I do, my boy." Kelley Sororean smiled at Mione. "My condolences, my dear. I hear that you and your husband have parted ways."

"We have." Mione didn't want to dwell on her Muggle divorce. "You haven't met Harry Sebastian have you?"

Harry shook hands with him. "Pleased to meet you, Sir."

"You too, Commander." Kelley let them all know that he knew exactly who Harry was. "Dr. Lupin was telling me that you have a memory you wish me to view."

"I do, Sir." Harry mouthed 'Doctor?' as he walked past Remus to pick up the pensieve from the side.

Kelley was sharper than any of them would have believed and had caught Harry's movement. "It's a professional courtesy, Commander."

"I have a doctorate in history." Remus revealed. "It's not something I usually advertise, but Dr. Sororean was one of my university professors."

"I'll say you didn't advertise it." Mione retorted. "I had no idea that you had a doctorate, nor that you knew Dr. Sororean before I met him at the last conference."

"That's because it's not important." Remus brushed off the relevance of what she'd just learnt. "Shall we get on and watch this memory?"

Inside the memory, Kelley viewed the frozen tablet. "Interesting. I've never seen such a detailed example of the Paelignian language before. Where did you say you got this?"

"I didn't." Harry had used his own memory of viewing the tablet inside Maddie's memory, rather than the actual memory itself. "Can you translate it?"

"Some of it, yes." Kelley was fascinated. "It talks about a date, 21st December 2012."

Remus whistled. "Muggles believe that the world is going to end on that date because Mayan calendars don't proceed past it."

"Quite." Kelley also knew this, and he ran his finger over the stone, tutting when it sank into the memory. "I hate memories. I like to be able to smell and touch what I'm translating."

"What else does it say?" Mione asked eagerly.

"Something about a passage and a divided land mass." Kelley frowned as he spotted a word he was totally unfamiliar with. "I've never come across this word before, so I can't exactly translate the next line; the word appears again in the third line. It's a pity a former colleague of mine is no longer with us."

"Colleague?" Harry questioned him immediately.

"Yes. Dr. Belvedere. He died in an accident some time ago." Kelley turned his attention back to the tablet. "The next line talks about a charm I think, and some form of water. And the final line discusses a weapon of some kind and immortality. There are other words around the outside of the stone but I'm afraid I have no idea what they are. They're most definitely not Paelignian."

Mione hadn't been aware of the additional writings until she'd viewed her daughter's memory, and this time she'd been unable to track down their source. "You have no idea at all?"

"I'm terribly sorry, my dear, but I don't." Kelly straightened up. "Are any of you going to tell me what this is about?"

"I'm afraid not." Harry withdrew, and the others followed, to find that Harry had pulled out his wand. "I'm sorry, Doctor but I will have to obliviate you before you leave."

"It's obviously Ministry business then." Kelley nodded. "Go ahead, young man, if you want to keep your secrets."

Harry did what was necessary. "Remus, take him back to wherever you found him."

"I'll be back as soon as I can." Remus vanished with the elderly unconscious professor in his arms.

Harry ran a hand through his hair. "We need to figure out exactly what this means but we do know one thing, time is running out for us."

Remus popped back in. "I sat him down in his chair and left. He's a strange fellow; was living in a tiny caravan in the middle of the outback. An Aboriginal contact of mine knew of him."

"Perhaps the good Doctor doesn't believe his friend's death was accidental; just like me." Harry picked up his jacket. "I'm going to portkey back to England but I'll be back in time to accompany Mione to take the children to Thomas' parents' home."

"See you when you get back then." Remus sat down opposite Mione as Harry vanished. "Are you alright?"

"Just tired, Remus. In fact I think I'll go to my room and go to bed." Mione just wanted to crawl under the covers and cry.

"I'll join Theresa and the kids, and see if they're okay." Remus understood that Mione needed some time alone. "I'll see you in the morning."

"Goodnight." Mione headed off to her bed.

Next Chapter: Cammie receives a surprising offer; Lucy finds herself under pressure; Remus and Mione struggle to piece together the information they'd discovered from Dr. Sororean.

Chapter 79: A Little Confession is Good for the Soul

This chapter is especially for Aealket who requested a little retribution for Sirius' actions against Lucy.

15th March 2012

Thomas handed Lucy a glass of wine. "So what do you think of my parents? You haven't said."

"You consider them your parents?" Lucy questioned Thomas' statement.

"Yes, in every sense of the word." Thomas had finally told Lucy all about where he'd originated from on the flight over to Sydney while Maddie had slept, as well as what he'd done to become Thomas Seville. He hadn't been surprised when Lucy had expressed her repugnance at his actions. "So, answer the question."

"They're wonderful people, and they obviously love Maddie very much." Lucy had liked them, and she'd been surprised when they'd been open and friendly with her. "They were rather effusive towards me."

"They care a great deal about Mione, but as far as they're concerned, I'm their son, and they care more about my happiness. And they both know I'm interested in you." Thomas revealed.

"You told them?" Lucy was mortified.

"Of course." Thomas grinned. "And Maddie sang your praises as well. I think they're already lining you up as my future partner."

"That's not funny, Thomas." Lucy felt more than a little uncomfortable. "Did you tell them that I wasn't interested in you?"

"Yes, but I also said that I believe that you're playing hard to get." Thomas grabbed her hand. "Come with me."

Lucy dug her heels in. "Where?"

Thomas found that his journey had been halted, as Lucy's superior strength stopped him in his tracks. "I just want to show you the rest of the house."

"Okay." Lucy relented and followed Thomas around the large but beautifully decorated home. "How much time do you spend here?"

"I use it when I stay with my parents, and they use it for guests." Thomas pushed at a bookcase. "This is a shortcut."

Lucy found herself in a plain but well appointed bedroom. "This is your bedroom, isn't it?"

"Yes." Thomas led Lucy out to the private area where the swimming pool was situated. "I wanted to show you the pool. The only access to it is through my bedroom." Thomas hooked his arm around her waist. "And you're welcome to use it any time you want."

Lucy immediately fell in love with the private and cove-like pool area, but she didn't want Thomas to get the wrong idea if she used it. "And what if you're in bed?"

"Well, you could either join me, or use the pool. It's entirely up to you." Thomas kissed the pulse that was beating at her throat.

Lucy twisted her head away. "Don't do that."

"You know you like it." Thomas, however, released her.

"I know nothing of the sort." Lucy put some distance between her and Thomas.

"What are you most afraid of?" Thomas went and sat down on one of the chairs that surrounded the deck area of the pool. "Sleeping with me, or giving up on the dream that it's never going to be Sebastian?"

“Neither.” Lucy sat down as well but at the opposite side of the table. “I resigned myself to the fact that Harry was out of my league quite some time ago, and he’s too much of a good guy to take advantage, even with Cassandra being in the position she is.”

“So why won’t you sleep with me?” Thomas challenged Lucy’s refusal.

Lucy met Thomas’ gaze. “Because I’m not the kind of woman who jumps into bed with a guy just because he’s rich and powerful, not even with someone like you.” Lucy got to her feet. “I’m going to lie down before dinner. I’ll see you in the lobby at eight.”

"Coward." Thomas called after her, but he didn't attempt to stop her.

Later that evening (Local time 8pm - UK time: 9am)

When Lucy met up with Thomas, she could see that he was distracted. "What's wrong?"

"Reg has been arrested." Thomas was worried about his friend. "I need to get back to England."

"You can't." Lucy reminded him of what the Judge had ordered. "Your children are coming here tomorrow. I know you care about Reg, but they have to come first."

Thomas sat down heavily as her words registered with him. "I warned him but he didn't want to listen. Black himself made the arrest."

"When is his trial?" Lucy asked.

"I don't know yet." Thomas was aware though that Harry wouldn't hang around. "I'm going to send Lucius in. I need to get Regulus out before the trial takes place."

Lucy reminded Thomas about the security that would be in place. "You know as well as I do that Reg will be guarded around the clock."

No-one expected you to spring me, so my own security wasn't so tight, but Reg's will be until they carry out his sentence."

Thomas got to his feet. "I can't just let them kill him."

"Why not?" Lucy knew she was pushing her luck but she wasn't going to change her attitude just because it was Regulus. "You've killed. What's the difference?"

Thomas swung around angrily on her. "Don't push it, Lucy. I like you but Reg means a damn sight more."

Lucy sensibly backed off. "Then I'm sorry. Because this time there's nothing you can do."

"I can at least send the best wizarding lawyers I have to defend him." Thomas knew that Regulus' only chance stood in arguing his case. "Come with me."

Over the next few hours, Thomas made arrangements for lawyers to defend his friend, until afterwards, he disappeared into his room and shut the world out.

BritAD HQ, Azkaban Island (Local time: 7pm (15 Mar) Sydney time: 6am (16 Mar))

Harry shook hands with Sirius. "Good evening, Minister."

"Drop the Minister shit, Harry." Sirius chided his son-in-law. "You know how it went here. How did it go in Oz?"

"I think Harry's guess is right about Viking being our former leak. Remus said that she defended Seville when he buttonholed her after the case." Having truly believed that Lucy had joined Thomas unwillingly, Harry had been angry and disappointed to find out that Sirius had been correct about the young woman's true allegiance. "But despite what Remus said, something isn't right. Why the hell would she let Harry bite her? Was it just to prove her loyalty? And

what was the point of going through a fight with Seville, and then showing it to us?"

"To throw us off the scent." Sirius suggested.

Harry shook his head. "I don't know. Something's off, and it's been bugging me for hours."

"Harry, stop worrying about Viking. She admitted her guilt, and we can deal with her when we apprehend him." Sirius passed Harry a folder. "I've signed off on these requests for a bigger budget to help with recruitment."

"Thanks." Harry put the papers in his in-tray to deal with when he returned from Australia, and he then turned around to face Sirius. "So what aren't you telling me?"

Sirius looked innocent. "I don't know what you mean."

Harry told him what he meant. "Sirius, you're feeling guilty about Viking."

"I just feel bad that I didn't spot her betrayal before all of this happened." Sirius looked down at the floor, before looking back up. "You know how it is."

Harry was convinced that Sirius still wasn't being honest with him but he didn't have time at that moment to delve deeper, and he decided that it would have to wait. "I suppose you're right."

"I am." Sirius then deliberately changed the subject. "How's Calico working out for you?" Sirius had been a little surprised when Harry had elevated the relatively young Auror to Harry's former position.

"I thought I'd told you. He didn't make it through the parole period. I haven't decided yet who is going to replace him but I have Edwina in the position on a temporary basis." Harry still wasn't sure if he was going to make her appointment permanent. "On the other hand, Julianne is fantastic in Lucy's former spot." Julianne Solace, who'd

ended up marrying Will Tracery, the former custodian of Azkaban, had jumped at the position when Harry had told her it would be entirely desk based.

“What will you do when Cassie comes back?” Sirius wondered where Harry intended to place his daughter.

“I’m going to create a niche position for her that will keep her out of the action.” Harry knew he was showing favoritism but he didn’t care. “I can’t deal with her being out there again, Sirius. When I get her back, I want her behind a desk.”

“She’s not going to like it.” Sirius warned him.

“I don’t give a damn.” Harry didn’t care how much his wife complained; he wasn’t letting her return to her former position and on active duty per se. “Sorry, I’d like to talk more but I have to go. I need to get back to accompany Mione to Seville’s place.”

“Be careful, Harry.” Sirius shook hands with Harry and rejoined the guard that now dogged his every footstep.

Harry tapped his chin as he considered Sirius, and the feelings he’d just been getting from him. He knew without a doubt that Sirius was hiding something, but as to what he had no idea. Normally Harry would have taken him to task but the journey back to Sydney would require three portkey trips with time in between each one to recover, and Harry was going to have to push himself to get back in time as it was. Deciding that he’d speak in more detail with Sirius when he saw him next, Harry picked up his multi-trip portkey, and vanished from his office.

16th March 2012

Sydney (Local time: 12pm UK time: 1am)

Mione held onto her children's hands, nervous at seeing Thomas again, but safe in the knowledge that he wouldn't attack her as, for the children's sakes, they'd both sworn that neither of them would

attempt to harm the other in the presence of their children. Mione knew, however, that the ceasefire didn't extend to Remus, and she'd been glad that Harry was the one to accompany her. She smiled with relief when she saw who was waiting to see her. "Hello, Rebecca."

Rebecca hurried over. "Mione, it's so nice to see you."

"I'm sorry about what's happened." Mione was hard pushed to hold back her tears as Rebecca's arms came around her. "And that I haven't been in touch."

"It's okay, Mione. We understand." Rebecca kissed Mione's cheek. "These things happen, and I want you to know that you'll always be welcome here." She then kissed Nat who was standing quietly at his mother's side. "I hear that you've turned into quite the artist. We can do some painting while you're here."

"I drew a picture of Mummy and my new brother in Mummy's tummy." Nat announced proudly, his speech already showing a massive improvement as a result of the school he'd been attending. "I can do one for you, Nanna."

"I'd like that." Rebecca knelt down to greet her youngest granddaughter. "Hello, Bella. Do you remember your Nanna?"

"Nanna Bec." Bella held out her arms to be picked up.

As Rebecca swung the girl into her arms and got to her feet, she led Mione over to the table where she had juice and cookies already set out. "Nat, these are for you and Bella."

As Nat and Bella occupied themselves with food, Rebecca turned to greet the man who'd accompanied Mione. "Hello, I'm Rebecca Seville."

"Harry Sebastian." Having refused to attend Mione and Thomas' wedding, Harry hadn't met either of Thomas' parents.

"Head of British Auror Division?" Rebecca questioned Harry's identification.

"Yes." Harry winked at Nat when he looked up at him.

"Are you two together now, Commander Sebastian?" Rebecca used Harry's correct title.

"No, I'm married, Mrs. Seville. Mione is a friend." Harry glanced around. "Is Maddie not here?"

"Thomas will bring her over shortly." Rebecca saw Mione's face become worried. "Don't be concerned. I know it's been hard but she's doing well." Rebecca glanced at Mione's stomach. "So you're expecting a little boy?"

"Yes." Mione rubbed her stomach. "He's due on 1st August. We've had a few hiccups along the way but thanks to my healer things have settled down now."

"And are you happy with your new partner?" Rebecca probed gently.

"Yes." Mione couldn't tell her the truth; that she and Remus weren't together. "Remus is a good man, and he loves the children."

"Good morning." Coming up the steps, Thomas interrupted them, Lucy and Maddie on either side of him. He didn't get a chance to say anything else as Nat jumped up to greet him and Maddie ripped free of Thomas' hold and ran to her mother. "Mum."

Mione couldn't stop her tears as she rose to her feet to hold her daughter. "I've missed you so much."

"I missed you too." Maddie could feel Mione's stomach against her, and she knew what such a big stomach meant. "Mum, are you going to have a baby?"

"I am." Mione sat down. "You're going to have a little brother. He's going to arrive in August."

"I want another sister." Maddie pouted. "Everyone has boys."

"I'm afraid there's nothing I can do about it." Mione said softly.

Leaving Mione to console her daughter, Rebecca played her part as hostess. "Commander Sebastian, you must already know Thomas if you're friends with Mione."

"Very well actually." Harry politely nodded his head. "Thomas."

"Harry." Thomas put his arm around Lucy's shoulders. "You remember my assistant, Lucy."

Harry met Lucy's eyes. "Of course I do. Hello, Lucy."

"Commander Sebastian." Lucy could feel Rebecca's confusion at the posturing that was going on.

Mione let go of Maddie. "As much as I'd like to spend more time with Maddie, Harry and I have to be off." Maddie pouted but didn't complain as Thomas had already warned her that Mione couldn't stay.

"May I speak to you alone first?" Thomas requested.

"Of course." Safe in the knowledge that Thomas couldn't harm Mione, as she walked off towards the sun room with Thomas, Harry turned to Lucy. "Perhaps you'd care to show me around the gardens, Lucy?"

Lucy made an excuse, not really sure what Harry wanted from her. "I'm not very au fait with Australian horticulture."

Harry refused to take no for an answer, and held out his arm. "Then you can just keep me company instead."

"I'd really rather not." Lucy refused. "I haven't met Nat and Bella properly yet."

Harry was conscious of why she wouldn't go with him. "Mione said that Mrs. Seville had the most amazing swimming hole designed out here, and I should see it if I get the chance." He could still feel Lucy's reluctance, and he changed his voice so that it came out in a teasing

fashion. "Give you my word that I'll bring you back when we've finished, and that I won't feed you to the fishies."

Flattered and very responsive to Harry's cajoling, Rebecca smiled at Lucy. "Lucy, you can get to know the children better when you get back. If you take Commander Sebastian down the righthand path, it will take you to the hole. It really is quite breathtaking."

Not wanting to appear rude in front of Rebecca, and aware that Harry believed in keeping his word, even if others didn't, Lucy took the arm that Harry was still holding out. "I'll be back shortly."

"That's okay, dear. Take your time." Rebecca watched them walk away. Aware that Thomas was interested in Lucy, Rebecca found herself wondering if Harry and Lucy had once dated, and whether that was the reason for the obvious tension between her son and Harry, and for Lucy's reluctance to accompany the head of BritAD. Deciding it was none of her business, she turned her attention to her three grandchildren instead.

A short time later Rebecca found herself wondering exactly what had gone on between both sets of couples when a stressed looking Mione returned first from her talk with Thomas, and then her son came out looking pale and shaken. A few moments later Lucy stalked back to the verandah looking angry, with Harry following in her wake. Harry was the only one of the group not to appear bothered in any way. Rebecca took Mione's hand. "Mione, I know you said you had to go but can I persuade you and Commander Sebastian to stay for lunch?"

"Harry has to get back to England, Rebecca. He has a case he's trying later today." Mione picked up her lightweight sweater with her free hand. "And Remus tends to worry about me, so I'm going to have to refuse as well. Perhaps when you're in England next we could get together. I'm afraid I'm only staying in Sydney until I come to collect the children on Sunday night."

"I'd like that." Rebecca was fond of her daughter-in-law and hugged her tightly. "I'll let you know when I'm next there."

"I look forward to it." Mione then kissed each of her children. "Be good for your Nanna and Grampy, okay." She then smiled tersely at Thomas and Lucy. "I'll see you when I collect the children."

"I'll have them ready and waiting." Thomas put his arm around Lucy's shoulders again. "Harry, have a safe trip back to England. I'm sure we'll soon meet again."

Harry read the challenge between the lines. "I look forward to it, Thomas. And I'm sure I'll have a most satisfying trip."

The moment they'd gone, Thomas turned to his mother. "Can you watch the children for me for a few minutes? I need to talk to Lucy about something."

"Take as long as you need." Rebecca had immediately taken to the outspoken American girl, although she'd been startled when Thomas had given her Lucy's name. But presuming that the Auror in England who'd been arrested for Dumbledore's murder merely shared the same name and was English, Rebecca had welcomed the young woman into her home. Having spent a pleasant breakfast with her son and Lucy, Rebecca hoped that something might blossom between the couple, especially given that Thomas had said he was interested in Lucy, and Mione had most definitely moved on.

Thomas led Lucy into the sunroom. "What did Sebastian want?"

"To rub it in about Reg." Lucy rolled her eyes. "Pompous bastard. He also had a message for you."

"Tell me." Thomas demanded.

"He said that you're welcome to try and free Reg, and that if you do, he'll be waiting for you." Lucy passed on Harry's message. "He's almost taunting you to try."

"That leads me to believe that Reg isn't in New Azkaban." Thomas had put out feelers and come back with nothing. "To keep him safely out of my hands, I think that he's been taken to an undisclosed location, which means that I couldn't rescue him if I wanted to. And

judging from what Mione has just said, his trial is going to be taking place shortly."

"So Harry's message was a trap, wasn't it?" Lucy had been disturbed by the short but enlightening conversation she'd held with her former boss.

"Yes, and I wouldn't put it past him to pull the same stunt at New Azkaban as I did at the Ministry." Thomas rubbed his chin. "So I'm afraid that for the moment, Reg is on his own."

"How did it go with Mione?" Lucy couldn't miss how pale Thomas was.

"I don't really want to talk about it." Thomas took a deep breath. "Right now I want to spend some time with all of my children, and I'd like for you to meet Nat and Bella."

"I'd like that as well." Like Rebecca, Lucy too was left wondering exactly what had transpired between Thomas and Mione, and she had little choice but to continue to wonder as she followed Thomas out to meet his children.

Ministry of Magic, Azkaban Island 7am

Having just arrived back from Sydney, Harry flashed his identification to the guards in the main corridor, and then stormed towards Sirius' office. "Is he alone?"

Daniel Thompson, Sirius' private secretary, greeted Harry. "Yes, Commander Sebastian. He's getting ready for the trial, and doesn't want to be disturbed."

"Tough." Harry marched past Thompson's desk and into Sirius' office, before closing the door behind him. "What the fuck is going on with Lucy?"

"I don't know what you mean." Sirius could see that his son-in-law wasn't very happy. "And I don't have time to talk about her now."

“Wrong. You’re going to make time.” Harry placed his hands on Sirius' desk and leant forward. “I knew something wasn’t right about Lucy's reaction to me at the courthouse. So when I got the chance to question Lucy alone, I used that opportunity to do so, as well as giving her a message to try and tempt Seville.”

"Do you think he'll take the bait?" Sirius had half-expected some sort of rescue to be mounted.

"I doubt it. He's not stupid. It's just a long shot, so he's not my main concern right now." Harry returned to the subject of Lucy. "Lucy, however, is. I knew yesterday that you were withholding something from me, Sirius. So, after managing to get her alone, I asked Lucy what had happened when you'd interviewed her after she'd killed Dumbledore, and why she'd joined Seville. She refused to answer my questions, no matter how hard I pressed her. In the end she almost spat out that perhaps I should ask you. She wasn't exactly polite about you either. She called you our so-called honorable Minister, and I could feel the distinct emotion of betrayal when she said your name. So, as a little confession is supposed to be good for the soul, I want you to start by telling me why Lucy feels betrayed by you, and why you feel so guilty about her. And don't even think about giving me that shit about feeling bad about not spotting what she's done. I want the truth.”

Sirius got up. “Hold on.” He stepped out of his office. “Delay the trial by an hour. I have something important to discuss with Commander Sebastian.”

Harry waited for Sirius to close the door. “I’m waiting.”

“Lucy’s spying for us.” Sirius sat back down. “I set it up for her to be arrested and taken to New Azkaban in the hope that Seville would fall for it.”

“So why didn’t you tell me?” Harry snapped. “When you made the arrangement with Lucy, you were head of BritAD but that's changed now. Don’t you think I needed to know?”

"No. Because of what had happened to Mione and Remus, Lucy would only do it on the proviso that no-one else was risked." Sirius passed on one of Lucy's demands. "Are you satisfied?"

"Hardly, as telling me couldn't have put me in any more danger from Seville than I already am." Harry quite rightly pointed out. "And you still haven't told me why Lucy felt so betrayed."

"Does it matter?" Sirius patently avoided answering the question.

"Sirius, answer the question or I swear I'll arrest you for obstruction." Harry barked at him.

"You do the same sort of thing all the time, Harry." Sirius started to get angry as well. "We both do."

"True, but if you don't tell me, I'm still going to arrest you." Harry warned his former boss. "Now tell me whatever it is that you're avoiding discussing."

Conscious that Harry would keep pushing until he found out the truth, Sirius had to reveal why he'd felt so guilty. "Two days before Seville got her out, Lucy sent me a message asking to see me, and I didn't respond to it."

Harry could barely believe what he was hearing. "She changed her mind, didn't she?"

"I don't know." Sirius avoided looking at Harry.

"Don't lie to me, Sirius." Harry knew that Sirius wasn't being honest. "You suspected she'd changed her mind, and so you ignored her. So not only did you desert her, but you also failed to tell me what you'd done. And don't say it was Lucy's choice not to tell me, as Lucy's choices very obviously went by the wayside."

"I didn't tell you because I knew you'd react like this." Sirius finally met Harry's eyes. "You'd have pulled her out."

"You're damned right I would. Lucy must have thought you were just going to leave her to die." Harry shook his head. "What the fuck were you playing at?"

"We needed someone on the inside, and you saw how Thomas reacted to her. She's more likely to be able find something out than Harry is." Sirius stuck up for his decision.

"And what have you learned?" Harry asked.

"Nothing. Lucy avoids Harry like the plague; she blames him for her condition." Sirius had to admit that so far Harry had failed to make contact.

"So Harry is aware of Lucy's involvement?" Harry knew that if he was, he was going to drag the Potter heir over the coals in a big way.

Sirius hadn't yet told Harry. "No. As I knew it would take time for Lucy to get close to Seville, I delayed telling Harry as I didn't want to jeopardize him."

"But it's okay to jeopardize Lucy?" Harry's eyes flashed amber, and he went on without giving Sirius time to respond. "So with Harry unaware of Lucy's true allegiance, she must really think she's on her own. Just like she thought she was on her own in that cell."

Sirius shifted uncomfortably. "Yes, but I wouldn't have left her to die."

"I know that but she fucking well obviously thought differently as she went with Seville." Harry clenched his fist, before smacking it down on the table. "What you did was downright callous. What the hell was wrong with you?"

"He'd just killed my son." Sirius climbed to his feet and yelled back at Harry, his emotions beginning to get the better of him. "I had to do something."

"Not at the cost of someone else's life. Not when it became apparent that they were going to refuse to do it." Harry understood

Sirius' pain but it still didn't give him the right to force someone else into the firing line.

"You do it all the time." Sirius continued to argue his case. "You send people out in the field who risk their lives every day."

"They signed up to do a job, Sirius, and they go willingly." Harry took several deep breaths, not wanting the argument to escalate out of control if he lost his temper. "Lucy had obviously had second thoughts, and if any of my Aurors came to me and said the same, I would pull them out."

Sirius refuted Harry's argument. "No, you wouldn't. Not if you wanted to get the job done."

"Yes, I would." Harry was adamant as to his stance. "Because an unwilling Auror is a danger, both to themselves and to those around them. You know that yourself, and yet you still offered Lucy up as a reluctant victim."

Sirius stood true to his decision. "Harry, I decided that it was probably only nerves that made her change her mind."

Harry didn't believe him. "No, you didn't. You decided that you wanted revenge for what happened to Orion, no matter what it cost."

"Does it matter?" Sirius couldn't deny Harry's allegation, and tried to divert Harry's attention away. "She's obviously well in with Seville, and doing the job I asked her to do. And I believe I was right about it being nerves."

"She's doing the job because she has little fucking choice." Harry could feel his temper rising again. "And I don't believe for a second that it was nerves that made her change her mind. I think she was afraid, Sirius, and you left her there."

"It was for the greater good." Sirius quoted Dumbledore.

“Greater good?” Harry stared at Sirius in amazement. “We both know it was nothing of the sort, and don’t try to justify your actions that way. This was always about Orion, and nothing as noble as the greater good.”

Sirius sat down again. “Do you have any idea what it’s like to lose a child, Harry? I don’t mean leaving them behind through choice. I mean having them forcibly ripped out of your existence. Of actually knowing that you’re never going to be able to see them again, talk to them, hold them, and tell them you love them.”

“No, I don’t. But consider what you’ve done to Lucy.” Harry countered. “Her parents disowned her. What about their grief? As far as they’re concerned, they’ve also lost a child. But for them it’s worse. They truly believe that their daughter was a turncoat, and any memories they have of Lucy are tainted. When I spoke to Tamsin she said that she’d rather Lucy have died than have gone over to Seville’s side.”

Harry's words slowly sank into Sirius' brain, and he dropped his head into his hands. "I'm sorry. I didn't think about that. I just saw a chance to get someone inside, and I took it."

Harry wasn't moved; his sympathies lay with Lucy and her family. "I can't undo what you've done. But I am going to offer Lucy an out if she wants it."

"But it will undo everything she's obviously managed to achieve." Sirius protested.

"I don't give a fuck." Harry was livid. "For someone who preaches justice and their belief in being honest, you've sunk pretty low, Sirius. And I'm warning you now, if it wasn't for the fact that the wizarding world in this country is in a complete fucking mess because of Seville, and that you were obviously not thinking straight because of your grief, I'd be throwing you into the deepest, darkest cell of New Azkaban and throwing away the key."

Even though he was entirely in the wrong, Sirius still didn't like being spoken to that way. "Just who the hell do you think you are? You owe me your respect."

"After what you've done to Lucy, you're going to have to earn my respect back, if you can." Harry then reminded Sirius of the power he now held. "And I know exactly who I am; I'm head of BritAD. And if I believe that anyone, including you, Minister, is misusing the power they possess, then I will do whatever I have to do to bring them to justice. And if anything happens to Lucy because of you, I swear I'll walk you through that fucking archway myself."

Sirius was shocked at Harry's attack on him. "You'd really do that to me, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I would." Harry confirmed. "And if I find out that you've pissed in my pool again and haven't told me about it, I will follow up on my threat. Is that clear, Minister?"

Sirius now found himself in the same position of many of the trainees Harry had taken to task before, and he didn't like it one bit. "Crystal."

"Good." Harry again took several deep breaths. "If you see Harry before I do, tell him I want to see him. He's going to take a message to Lucy that if she wants out, she can have it. And I don't care if he has to lie in wait under her bed to give it to her."

"I'll tell him." Sirius could now barely meet Harry's eyes. "Harry, I'm sorry."

"It's a little late for that." Harry straightened up and turned towards the door. "I'll see you in the trial, Minister." Harry left the room, his hands shaking as he closed the door behind him.

Potter Place - 8am

Cammie stood with her hands on her hips. "I want to go."

H.J. refused. "I don't think it's a good idea. And it's also a closed trial, and you don't have clearance."

"We both know your bloody precious Minister could arrange it." Cammie argued.

"He could, but he won't." H.J. had already anticipated Cammie's request. "You're going to have to stay here."

Cammie turned into her mother's arms and started to cry.

"Are you coming?" H.J. asked his wife.

"Just go, H.J." Hermione's voice reflected her amazement and disgust that her husband had just refused their daughter access to witness Regulus' trial in one breath, yet invited her along in another.

H.J. let himself out of the room.

The Next Day

Cammie lifted her head from her pillow at the gentle tap at her door. "Go away."

Harry Potter opened it. "Mie, it's Harry." Cammie and Harry had long made up their differences, especially when Cammie had found out what he'd had to do, and what he was trying to do now. And from that start they'd manage to salvage a friendship again.

"Come in." Cammie sat up. "Did Thomas get him out?" Cammie knew it was wrong to hope but the thought that Regulus could die was more than she could bear.

"I'm really sorry, Mie." Harry closed the door behind him. "He didn't. He's still in Australia."

"So Regulus is going to be executed?" Cammie's voice trembled.

"No. Black was lucky. Thomas found him some damn good lawyers, and they injected enough doubt into their arguments to save him from that fate. I think it went to the wire though; it was debated overnight before a decision was reached early this morning." As an Unspeakable Harry had been able to attend the trial and had witnessed what had happened. Unfortunately for Lucy, Harry didn't get to speak to either Harry or Sirius. And as Thomas had no idea that he'd left Hogwarts again that morning, Harry had left as soon as the sentence had been announced to tell Cammie, and to get back to Hogwarts in case Thomas tried to contact him. "So instead of the death penalty, Regulus has been sentenced to life in New Azkaban. However, they're not going to take the chance that Thomas will try to rescue him, and they're therefore going to render him useless to Thomas."

"What do you mean by useless?" Cammie didn't understand what Harry meant.

Harry made it clear. "They're going to strip him of his magic."

"That won't stop Thomas." Cammie pointed out. "He can use the same ritual he used on himself."

"That's why they're also not moving Regulus to New Azkaban straightaway. He's going to be transferred to a safe house until Thomas has been caught or killed." Harry still hadn't finished though. "Mie, Uncle Sirius is also disowning him. I'm so very sorry."

Cammie felt scared by the look on Harry's face. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

Harry realized that Cammie probably wasn't aware of pureblood customs. "When Uncle Sirius disowns Regulus, he will have to disavow all of Regulus' children except for his legitimate children, who he'll offer protection to."

"I don't see that as a problem." Cammie had no qualms about what name her child bore.

“There's more.” Harry sat down on the edge of the bed and took Cammie’s hand. “When Uncle Sirius disowns Regulus, he will no longer be part of the Black family, and his marriage will become null and void. It's one of the rare circumstances a pureblood marriage can be dissolved, and is only being allowed this time because of the extreme circumstances. Petra will revert back to being a Parkinson, and Regulus’ two legitimate children will be adopted by Uncle Sirius to allow them to remain as part of the Black family, even though they will remain living with their mother. I don’t know for certain but I imagine that Virginie DuPont’s children with Regulus will undergo the Abrogo Progenitor ritual, with Virginie's husband taking Regulus' place.” Harry could see realization dawning on Cammie’s face. “Any child left unprotected will lose their magic.”

“My baby will become a squib?” Cammie’s voice shook.

Harry nodded. “Unless you have protection. I can offer you that protection.”

“How?” Cammie hoped it wasn't what she thought it was.

Harry set out the only way. “Marry me and I’ll adopt your son.”

Cammie cradled her stomach as she thought about Regulus’ last words. “I’m sorry, Harry, but I can’t accept.”

“Mie, I know you don’t love me, but think about the baby.” Harry pleaded. “He'll lose his magic if you don't do this.”

“I am thinking about my son.” Cammie squeezed Harry’s hand. “And I’m sorry if it hurts to hear this but I’d rather my son was born Reg's squib than your magical heir.”

It did hurt, but Harry still tried to get her to reconsider. “Don't do this to him.”

"It's not exactly a bad thing." Cammie rubbed her stomach, as she met Harry's eyes. "Luna's children are squibs and she said that

they're no less loved because of it. And my son will be no less loved by me."

"You're not going to change your mind, are you?" Harry could see she was resolute.

"No." Cammie gave a teary smile. "Although I know I'll never be able to spend my life with him, I love Reg too much to marry anyone else, not even you."

Harry let go of her hand. "I would have done everything to try and make you happy."

"I know you would have, Harry." Cammie kissed his cheek. "And despite what's happened between us, I'll always consider you a friend."

"And I'll always be here if you need me." Harry's voice choked up at the end of the sentence, and he turned on his heel, and left the room.

20th March 2012

Birmingham

Still tired from her trip back, Mione sat at the breakfast table, reading through the draft court papers she'd received late the previous night. "I never expected him to act this quickly."

"He's obviously feeling guilty." Remus knew what had transpired between Mione and Thomas.

"I really thought I'd feel good about it, but I don't." Mione thought about the look on Thomas' face. "He was absolutely devastated. I could see it."

"Serves the bastard right." Remus didn't give a toss about Thomas' feelings. "The only people whose feelings I give a shit about are yours and the children's."

“It still wasn’t easy, Remus.” Mione folded the papers up. “But I’m glad I did it.”

“Let’s change the subject; I don’t want to talk about him at breakfast.” Remus poured himself a cup of tea. “Saying that, what we do have to get sorted is Seville related.”

“You mean the tablet, don’t you?” Mione didn’t get any further as all three of her children, and Remus’ own two daughters came piling into the room, Theresa shepherding them along.

Theresa gave orders to them and all five took their places, Bella and Sophia being lifted into their booster chairs by Remus. “I can keep an eye on them if you want, Mione.”

“It’s okay, Theresa.” Mione smiled at the kindly and loyal nanny. “You didn’t exactly expect to have five children to look after, even if it is just for a day.” Nat had school to attend the next day as did Emily, who usually went to a small private primary school in London; Buffy having changed her mind about returning home to the US.

“I love it, and they’re all such good children.” Theresa ruffled Maddie’s hair. “And it’s wonderful to see this one again.”

Maddie grinned up at Theresa. “You really missed me?”

“Of course I did.” Theresa assured her.

After breakfast, Theresa rounded up all five children and took them off Mione’s hands, leaving her and Remus free to pursue the mystery of the tablet’s newly translated text. Mione pulled out the sheet of paper that she’d written down the information that they’d found out. “Let’s do it line by line.”

Remus could easily remember exactly what Dr. Sororean had said. “So we’re looking for a passage and a divided land mass?”

“Yes.” Mione had armed herself with several notepads so that she and Remus could write down their thoughts. “Passage has so many

different connotations but I believe that it is something to do with a route rather than a piece of writing.”

“I’d agree as it appears in the same sentence as the divided land mass.” Remus thought quickly. “I believe it’s talking about an island such as Ireland, the UK or Iceland.”

“That hardly narrows it down. It could be Australia for all we know.” Mione tapped her pencil against the pad as she thought. “The next line said something about water; perhaps that’s also something to do with the island we’re looking for.”

“I agree.” Remus had no idea that Dr. Sororean had translated the sentence incompletely and it should have been ‘water of life’. “The charm is probably exactly that, a spell or magical trinket of some sort.”

“The immortality is an obvious one but a weapon could be anything.” Mione scowled. “This is far too frustrating. We need to be able to translate the writing around the edge of the stone as well. I’m willing to bet that it outlines what to do with the Four Pillars.”

“Again, I have to agree with you.” This time Remus was right. And so had Dr. Sororean been when he’d said that it was a pity about Dr. Belvedere’s death, as it had been him who’d translated the information for Rupert and Thomas. And he’d also translated the unknown writing around the outside of the stone; the translation of which was now in Thomas’ hands.

Next chapter: We find out what went on between Mione and Thomas; H.J.’s decision to use Cammie as bait has serious consequences; Lucy makes contact with a new ally; Cassandra makes headway in planning to liberate Hogwarts.

Chapter 80: Guilt

21st March 2012

Lucy had sat and worked during the overnight flight from Sydney to Miami. She glanced over as the bedroom door opened. "Feeling better?"

"Not really." Thomas rubbed his aching head. "Have you slept at all?"

"I didn't need any sleep." Lucy responded. "Can I get you some tea?"

"Geraldine can fetch it." Thomas sat down as Lucy got up. "Where are you going?"

"To get your tea." Lucy walked off, and returned a few minutes later with a tray.

"Why are you doing this?" Thomas took the tray from her and placed it on the table. "You made it quite clear yesterday that you were angry with me when I threatened you, so why are you suddenly being so nice?"

"It isn't for you I'm doing this." Lucy sat down with a mug of black coffee. "Geraldine is in the back of the galley crying again about Reg." Regulus' trial had made headline news even though only two reporters had been allowed inside.

Thomas had seen the young woman struggle with her tears when she'd first greeted him when he'd apparated in. "I know she and Reg had a brief fling some years back, but I didn't think she was that attached to him after all this time."

"That's because you don't bother to talk to people. If you did, you'd know that it's got nothing to do with her previous dalliance with him. She genuinely likes him, Thomas." Lucy informed him. "He's flown with you so many times now, and he's always been nice to her, and she's upset because of what they've done to him."

"I don't see what the big deal is. I can give him his magic back when I get him out." Thomas stirred his tea.

"By taking someone else's life and their magic?" Lucy pulled a face. "That's hardly a fair trade-off for the poor bastard you attack."

"So you'd rather see Reg live his life as a squib?" Thomas knew that he wouldn't.

"Yes, I would." Lucy couldn't deny that she liked Regulus. He was the only other Death Eater she'd even vaguely been interested in befriending as he'd made an effort to be nice to her, including defending her against Thomas. But it still didn't make what Thomas was suggesting sit any better with her. "Reg is a nice guy but at the end of the day he's still a killer, even if they couldn't prove that beyond a shadow of a doubt. And what you're intending to do is wrong, Thomas. So very, very wrong."

"So is helping me to break him out." Thomas reminded her of what she'd agreed to do.

"You threatened to lock me up without Wolfsbane if I didn't. And I know what you use Greyback and Potter for when you do that." Lucy reminded him of his usual use for werewolves. "And as you pointed out to me previously, you like me but Reg is far more important to you."

"I didn't mean it about the Wolfsbane; I was just angry that you didn't want to help me." Thomas reached out and took Lucy's hand. "Look, Lucy, I'm not going to force you to help me, but I'd appreciate it if you did."

"Why?" Lucy had taken Thomas' threat seriously when he'd made it, aware that he was more than likely to carry it out, as much as she knew he wanted to sleep with her.

"Because you know the place inside out." Thomas had a good working knowledge of the layout of New Azkaban but it wouldn't be as good as Lucy's. "And because I trust you to watch my back."

"So I can refuse?" Lucy verified that Thomas wasn't going to inflict a night in a cage without Wolfsbane if she continued to say no.

"As I said, I was angry when I threatened you, so yes, if you want to, you can refuse." Thomas let go of her hand. "And if you do, I'll ask Harry to accompany me instead."

Lucy took the opportunity to refuse. "Then you'd better take Potter, because, even as much as I like Reg, I don't want to help you."

"Fair enough." Thomas didn't push it; his outburst the previous day having been driven by anger and worry about Regulus. "But once I have Reg free, I want you to arrange the paperwork for his new life, and find him a house in a wizarding district in San Francisco."

"If I must." Lucy took the folder that Thomas was holding. "But it goes against every instinct to help you to do this."

"I know it does." Thomas lifted Lucy's hand up again and placed a kiss in the palm of her hand.

Lucy was incredulous. "I've just refused to help and told you that I disagree with what you're doing, and you're flirting with me?"

"I'm flirting with you because I want you, Lucy." Thomas leaned across the table that separated them, and kissed her.

When they'd been in Sydney, Thomas had been overly affectionate with her, and Lucy had found it hard to push him away without causing a scene, especially as his parents and children had usually been there. This time, however, as there was no family around to prevent her from being rude, she quickly retreated from the display of affection. "I'm not doing this, Thomas."

"When you stop kissing me back, then maybe I'll stop kissing you." Thomas gave her a proviso, and then switched back over to business. "Who are the main guests at the Gladstone event?"

Grateful to be free of Thomas' attentions, Lucy opened up the relevant folder, and began to go through who she'd lined up.

March 24th 2012

Lucy stood up with everyone else as the meeting ended, intending to go into the gardens. Thomas had noticed how pale she was, and he stopped her from leaving; questioning her while everyone else began to leave the room. "Are you alright?"

"Just a twinge." Lucy rubbed her forehead. "I've had a headache threatening all day."

"I'll get you something for it." Thomas walked through his bedroom and into his bathroom, returning with a headache potion. "Here you go."

"Thanks." Lucy swallowed it. "I think I've just been spending too much time indoors slaving over the Richie deal. I'm going to take a walk before I get ready for dinner."

Lucy scowled when the last of Inner Circle to leave almost bumped into her as he finished picking up his things. "Be a little more careful, Potter."

"I'm so sorry." Harry responded just as snottily before he walked off.

Thomas wished that the two of them could get along, but he was conscious that Lucy loathed the man who'd turned her. "If you still feel unwell, let me know." Thomas then headed towards his bedroom, and Lucy made her way out.

Once she reached the gardens, Lucy set off on the pathway that would lead her around the perimeter of the house, and not into the maze. She jumped when a voice reached her ears again. "It's the end of the world, Lucy. Don't look back. Just act naturally, and keep walking."

"Who are you?" Lucy wondered who'd given her the password that Sirius had originally supplied before she'd ended up in New Azkaban, and she was a little suspicious after the amount of time that had passed since then.

Harry smiled behind his mask; not that he needed it, the invisibility spell he'd cast rendering him almost undetectable. "I've cast a conversational spell so that you can hear what I'm saying through the silencing spell I have on me but you only have to whisper very quietly for me to hear you."

Lucy stopped walking as she made a guess at who was following her. "Potter?"

"Keep walking." Harry urged, but didn't confirm her guess.

"What's going on?" Lucy wasn't sure if this was some sort of test.

"Commander Sebastian sent me, and this is the first chance I've had to catch you alone." Harry quickly told her what his commanding officer had said. "He said that you'd still be suspicious even with the password, so he also told me to tell you that he hopes that you carry more than just a lipstick and Muggle matches now. Although the chocolate bar was welcome."

Lucy smiled to herself as she remembered Harry's chastising when she'd found him in the cave under Azkaban. "What do you want?"

"I'm here to tell you that you can come in from the cold." Harry hadn't heard the phrase before, and Harry Sebastian had had to explain that it was a Muggle expression, and what it meant.

Lucy, however, had. "Why now?"

"He didn't know what the Minister had done to you." Harry himself had been shocked but like Harry Sebastian, he'd understood that it had been grief and revenge driving Sirius' decision. "And he wanted you to know that the Minister had every intention of getting you out before anything happened to you."

Lucy felt a wave of anger wash over her. "Fat consolation that is to me now. I thought he'd left me there to die. It's the only reason I went with Thomas when he showed up. I really believed that our august

Minister wanted to sweep the Dumbledore killing under the carpet and me along with it."

"Harry said he thought as much." Harry continued to follow Lucy. "But it's all over now."

Lucy believed differently. "No, it's not. I can't go back now. I haven't put up with this much shit just to roll over and play dead. I don't know if you know but we're running out of time."

"We know." Harry hadn't realized that Lucy knew of Thomas' plans. "It's strange. Harry also said that you'd say no to returning."

"And he was right. There's no way you'd be able to get anyone else in here, and as close to Thomas as I am now." Lucy didn't like it but she was also aware that the fate of the wizarding world might well rest on her shoulders. "I have access to his diaries; I know his movements weeks in advance. I can help if you can take messages back for me."

"Go around the house again." Harry interrupted her as they reached the front door.

Lucy set off on another circuit. "I'd better start by telling you that Thomas is planning to free Reg."

"We already figured as much." Harry was aware of what arrangements had been made to prevent this from happening. "Is there anything else?"

"Not at the moment. I'll check his diaries for any days when he has nothing pencilled in. The last two attacks he led on Manchester and Glasgow were both days I wasn't needed, and he'd pencilled them out a few days in advance." Lucy had to resist the urge to turn around and look, even though she assumed that Harry was hidden by an invisibility spell. "So how do I contact you if I find out something more useful?"

"Just whisper the password, and a meeting place." Harry instructed her, before revealing that she'd been right about his identity. "But make sure you only do it when there's a meeting of the Inner Circle,

and before we take our masks off. I'm not the only werewolf in Thomas' ranks."

"Tell me something I don't know." Lucy's voice reflected her bitterness.

"I'm sorry I did that to you but I had no choice." Harry finally apologized for what he'd done.

"Is that what you told your victims' families?" Lucy knew she was attacking someone who was in the same position as she was but witnessing what he'd done had been horrifying. "Your apologies won't bring them back."

"I know that an apology won't change what I did to you. And as for those people in the Ministry, well, you of all people should know that appearances can be deceptive." Harry didn't bother to explain his comment. "This is where I leave you."

"But..." Lucy heard a tiny crack and she stopped speaking, knowing that Harry was gone since, like the remainder of the Inner Circle, he could apparate out from anywhere in Castrum House.

6th April 2012

Harry threw down his cloak, and after taking Cassandra into the bedroom, handed over some papers. "These are from your husband."

Cassandra opened the papers up to find details of exactly how the charms on the vanishing cabinets worked. "Where did he get these?"

"One of his operatives." Harry didn't know that it was Anna Jameson who'd provided the information. "He said that with a little work you should be able to solve the dimensional switching problem that relates to the particular cabinet held here."

Cassandra unfolded a small note that had her name on it, and smiled as she read the message from her husband. "He misses me."

"I know that." Harry sat down. "And he knows that you miss him as well. I think he must have a copy of every memory I have with you in it. Sometimes I feel like a messenger boy."

"Sorry." Cassandra felt a little guilty.

"It's okay." Harry waved off her apology. "It's just that I'm running messages between Dad and Tonks, Father and Harry, and Remus, Neville and Nicole." When things had settled down after the initial takeover, suspecting that Nicole had hidden in Remus' Fidelius protected apartment at the Academy, Harry had gone in to check. After disarming her, he'd explained that he was there to help. Since then he'd been running messages to and from the girl, including providing her with food.

Starting to feel maudlin about how many people were caught up in Thomas' mess, Cassandra put down the papers. "Do you think this will really work?"

"It has to." Harry told her. "But it's still going to take a hell of a great deal of planning. Harry said that he'll come through when you get the cabinet working in conjunction with the one in the Black family vault. He wants to scope out the lay of the land before he risks anyone in trying to liberate this place, and we're also going to have to wait for a window of opportunity. We can't have Thomas here when we do this."

"So it was fortuitous that you found out about Lucy, wasn't it?" Cassandra had been over the moon to find out that the girl hadn't betrayed them after all.

"I just wish Uncle Sirius had told me sooner." Harry was still angry with his godfather.

"Is Harry speaking to him yet?" Cassandra had been told that her husband had been beyond furious.

"Not unless he has to." Harry himself was only speaking to his godfather for the same reason. "But Harry does understand why Sirius did it. You don't didn't see him at the funeral, Cassandra."

Cassandra didn't really want to discuss her brother as the pain still too raw for her, and she focused on Lucy instead. "Dad still shouldn't have done it. To leave her alone like that in that cell was terrible." Cassandra rubbed her arms up and down, shivering as she thought about what Lucy must have gone through. "I don't know how Lucy can do what's she doing, though. She's braver than me. I'd have taken up Harry's offer of leaving. The thought of having to have sex with Thomas makes me want to vomit."

Harry had to acknowledge Lucy's bravery. "Lucy's no more enamored of the idea than you are but she also knows that no-one else can get that close. She's played a clever game by not giving into him. It's made him want her all the more."

"But she can't hold out forever, Harry." Cassandra shuddered. "Not if she wants to get as close as we need her to be."

"She knows that." Harry had met with Lucy the previous day as she'd been able to warn him that Thomas was planning something in a week's time as he'd told her to keep his calendar clear for a day, and that she wouldn't be needed until the evening. Unfortunately it was too soon to put their own plan into operation, and they still had no idea what Thomas was doing, but they suspected it might have something to do with Regulus, and Harry Sebastian had therefore placed New Azkaban on alert. "But she's a determined little thing."

"You like her, don't you?" Cassandra teased.

"Not like that." Harry threw a pillow at Cassandra. "And I know for certain she doesn't like me."

"Because of what she thinks you did at the Ministry?" Cassandra asked.

"There's no think about it, Cassandra." Harry's face became serious. "I may have managed to avoid killing some of the people in there when Greyback was occupied in other rooms but I still killed more than enough to make her right about me."

"Harry, you can't beat yourself up about it." Cassandra got up and placed a hand on his arm. "You knew what Thomas would likely ask of you when you forced Harry to turn you. And because of you nine people are still alive."

"Nine out of more than one hundred is hardly anything to pat myself on the back about." Once Thomas had restored the magic to the whole of the Ministry, Harry had returned, and had tracked the group down to an old basement room. After changing into his Unspeakable's cloak so that they wouldn't fire on him, he'd created a portkey and, after making sure that every single one of them was touching him, had portkeyed them all to safety. "But I suppose it's better than them dying."

"Harry, it's not just them you've saved." Cassandra tried to get Harry to look on the positive side. "How many people have you saved during all the attacks that Thomas has carried out?"

"That's hardly the point." Harry protested; his own guilt at his actions ate away at him every day.

"Yes, it is." Cassandra knew exactly how many people Harry had saved, as she'd become his confidante as he had no-one else. "You've saved forty-three people, Harry, not including those at the Ministry. Forty-three people whose lives would have ended if you hadn't been there."

"But I've still killed more than I care to remember." Harry reminded her. "I know you're trying to make me feel better, Cassandra, but it won't work. It's just something I have to live with."

"I suppose so." Not wanting to upset him further, Cassandra changed the subject. "I'm going to start on these notes. The sooner I solve the problem, the quicker I can get out."

"I need some sleep." Harry lay down on the bed. "If I don't wake up by four, call me."

"I'll get your Wolfsbane ready." Cassandra promised. "Now go to sleep, I've got work to do."

One Week Later

Hermione sat down on Cammie's bed. "Honey, you've got to eat more."

"I'm not hungry." Cammie had tried to eat but just felt sick all the time.

Hermione had been about to cajole Cammie again when a knock sounded at the door. She got up and answered it. "What do you want, H.J.?" Even though almost a month had gone by since Regulus' arrest and trial, Hermione and her husband were still barely on speaking terms.

H.J. couldn't miss the continued hostility in his wife's voice. "I just wanted to see how Cammie is doing."

"How do you think she's doing? What you've done to Regulus has destroyed her, H.J." Hermione couldn't help her snide tone.

"He's a Death Eater, Hermione." H.J. hissed at his wife, keeping his voice low. "What were we supposed to do? Let him walk around scot-free?"

"No, but using Cammie to entrap him was despicable." Hermione hissed back at him.

"I'm sorry." H.J. apologized.

"Sorry isn't going to give her child its magic back, H.J." Hermione snapped. "Excuse me, my daughter needs me."

H.J. found the door shut firmly in his face.

Cammie barely moved as Hermione took her hand. "What did Dad want?"

Hermione scowled. "To see how you were."

Cammie sat up. "He's got no right to ask after what he did." She placed her hand on her stomach. "It's his fault my baby has lost its magic." On the night she knew that Regulus' sentence would be carried out, Cammie had felt a ripple go through her body, and she'd spent most of the night in tears in her mother's arms, knowing what it meant.

"Your Dad didn't know this would happen." Hermione stroked Cammie's face.

"I know that." Cammie's voice was bitter. "He thought that Reg would be executed instead. Now because Dad used me, my baby is a squib."

"Why didn't you take Harry up on his offer?" Cammie had refused to discuss it so far with Hermione.

"Because this baby isn't his child, and if I'd married Harry, then it would have been as if the love Reg and I had for each other never existed." Cammie finally told Hermione her reasons for her refusal. "I told Reg I'd love him always, and I will." She started to cry. "Mum, I can't do this without him."

"Baby, I'm sorry." Hermione rocked Cammie. "But I'll be here for you."

A second knock sounded at the door, and Hermione uncharacteristically snapped. "Just bugger off."

The door opened and Harry Potter put his head around it. "I'm sorry to bother you."

Cammie wiped her eyes. "It's okay, Harry. We thought it might be Dad."

Harry shook his head. "No, just me. It's about Regulus."

Cammie went taut. "Is he alright?"

"I've just found out that he's gone." Harry revealed. "He was there last night, and gone this morning. The guards were all dead."

"Uncle Thomas got him out didn't he?" Cammie didn't even notice her mother's arm tightening around her shoulders.

"I presume so but I had nothing to do with it, and had no idea that it was going to take place." Harry was able to admit to being in the dark, as Thomas had gone alone. "What no-one can work out though is how Thomas knew that Regulus was being held in a safe house rather than in New Azkaban. Harry was waiting for him there, but he was a no-show."

"It looks as though the Ministry still has a leak." Hermione responded.

Cammie didn't care about the leak. "He's really out?"

Harry nodded. "Yes."

"I have to find him." Cammie went to get off her bed.

"No." Hermione turned to her daughter. "Cammie, I know you love him but you can't leave here. You're still under house arrest. If you go out without permission, Harry can have you transferred to New Azkaban."

"But Mum." Cammie protested.

"No, Cammie." Hermione's voice was firm. "I won't let you."

Cammie sank back down on the bed. "Can I be alone?"

"Of course." Hermione kissed her daughter's cheek, and left the room.

Harry, however, didn't follow her, and Cammie waited until Hermione had closed the door to address him. "You know what I'm going to do, don't you?"

"Where did you get the portkey?" Harry knew she had to have one.

"Reg slipped it to me at the hotel." Cammie admitted. "Why didn't you tell Mum?"

"Because I know how it feels to love someone so much that you'll pretty much do anything because of them." Harry gave a small smile.

"I'm sorry, Harry." Cammie was conscious that he meant her.

"It's okay, Mie." Harry sighed. "So I suppose this is goodbye." When Cammie tearfully smiled, Harry brushed away a tear that slid down her cheek with his thumb. "I don't know why but I have the feeling I won't see you again."

"Don't say that." Cammie wrapped her arms around Harry's waist, her stomach now starting to get in the way.

Harry could smell her chamomile shampoo as he hugged Cammie, and he wanted nothing more than to kiss her but he'd resigned himself to the fact that his time with her was long over. "Just promise me that you'll be careful."

"I promise." Cammie kissed his cheek. "Tell Mum that I'm sorry, and that I'll be in touch with her. And tell her I love her very much."

"I will." Harry let go of her.

Cammie grasped the tiny silver ring that was held around her throat by a chain. "Templar Sanctum."

Harry headed off to give Hermione the bad news. After Harry had told her, Hermione apparated upstairs to the side room off her bedroom where Cammie had been staying, and burst into tears.

Harry could hear her even downstairs, and he made his way into the study where H.J. had retreated to. "H.J., Hermione needs you in Mie's room. I have to get back before I'm missed."

"I'll see you when I see you then." H.J. apparated to his wife's side. "Hermione, what's wrong?"

Hermione sobbed into her handkerchief. "Cammie's gone to him."

"To Thomas?" H.J. jumped to the right conclusion as to the portkey's destination but it hadn't been who his wife had meant.

"No, to Regulus." Hermione lifted a tear drenched face. "She said she couldn't do this without him. Then she spoke to Harry alone and told him to tell me that she was sorry before she disappeared." Harry had sensibly not mentioned that he'd let Cammie leave.

"Hermione, I..." H.J. found his hand being shrugged off.

"Get off me." Hermione stood up, her face cold as she let her tears fall. "I don't want you anywhere near me. Cammie blames you for what happened to her, and right now I agree with her."

"It's not my fault what happened to the baby." H.J. argued.

"I think differently." Hermione sank back onto the bed. "You caused this."

"For goodness sake, Hermione." H.J. was getting fed up with taking the blame. "He's a fucking Death Eater."

Hermione shouted back at him. "A Death Eater our daughter was in love with. When you used her like that, something broke in her, H.J., and it wasn't the fact that Regulus had gone that hurt her the most, it was the fact that you trapped him by using her. You, Sirius and Harry; you all used her."

"Hermione, don't be like this." H.J. had never seen his wife act so angrily towards him.

"Why not, H.J.?" Hermione shouted. "If Thomas doesn't believe that she didn't help you, she could be going to her death. And even if he does believe her, I'm probably never going to see her again."

"Regulus knew that Cammie hadn't helped." H.J. pointed out. "And I'm sure Cammie will be in touch."

"You can't know that." Hermione lowered her voice. "Now get out. And while you're out tell Harry and Sirius that if I see them again, I won't be responsible for my actions."

H.J. didn't move. "This is ridiculous, Hermione."

"No, H.J. What's ridiculous is that you put your job and your hatred of all things dark above your family. The man I thought I knew wouldn't have done that." Hermione pointed out at the door. "So before I do or say something I'll regret, I want you to get out."

H.J. thought Hermione was overreacting. "Hermione..."

He recoiled as Hermione's voice rose to a scream. "I said get out."

H.J. held up his hands in defeat and opened the door. "Okay, I'm going."

"Good. And don't come back." Hermione grabbed the water glass from the side table and hurled it at the door as it closed, before dropping down onto the bed and continuing to cry.

The Island

Thomas was alerted by his ring that someone had breached his wards. He knew of only two people who had access to them except for those there. Worrying that it was Mione and something was wrong with one of the children, Thomas hurried out to the hallway, to find his niece there. "This is a surprise."

"Where is he?" Cammie was frightened by the tone of Thomas' voice, especially given what he'd done to Mione and Remus.

"Who?" Thomas didn't budge.

"Regulus." Cammie looked hopefully at Thomas. "Please tell me."

"You left him, Cammie, and then you tricked him into meeting you." Even though Regulus had told Thomas that Cammie had said she

hadn't known, Thomas wasn't quite as ready to believe the young woman as Regulus was. "Why should I help you now?"

"I didn't trick him and we need him." Cammie put her hands over her stomach.

"You and your squib baby?" Thomas' voice was frosty.

Cammie defended her baby. "I don't care if my baby is a squib. I love him, and so does Reg."

"You can't know that. He didn't find out about him until after you'd left." Thomas pointed out.

Cammie scowled at her Uncle. "I know because our son was conceived in love. And no-one, not Uncle Harry, not my father, and most certainly not you, can ever take that away from us. And I don't care what you or anyone else says, I'm glad that Regulus is my baby's father."

"But not glad enough to come to ask me to get him out." Thomas countered.

Cammie explained why she hadn't. "I love Reg but I wasn't going to be responsible for other people's deaths in order for him to be with me."

"Then perhaps you don't really love him." Thomas pushed.

"If I could have taken Reg's place, then I would have." Cammie snarled at Thomas, starting to lose her temper. "I'd die for him if I had to, but I'm not going to ask someone else to pay for the price for him. I couldn't live with that."

"You'd really die for him?" Thomas questioned Cammie's words.

"In a heartbeat." Cammie stared at Thomas. "Because if he's not alive, then my life isn't worth living."

"In that case..." Thomas stood aside. "...he's in the third room on the left."

Cammie stood stunned for a moment, before she rushed past Thomas.

In his bathroom, Regulus closed his eyes and continued to let the hot water spray over him, relishing the feel of the liquid as it ran down his skin, the conditions in the safe house hardly being conducive to such a luxury. Hearing the shower door open, he opened his eyes. "What the... Cam?"

Cammie stood in the doorway, getting wet from the spray. "Hello, Reg."

Regulus pulled her into his arms and began to kiss her, only stopping when she pushed gently at his chest. "How did you manage to escape to be able to use the portkey?"

"After your sentence was carried out, Mum moved me into a side room off her bedroom as she was frightened because I couldn't eat and she wanted to keep an eye on me. It isn't warded." Cammie kissed his chest as he held her against him, feeling safer than she had done in months.

"Cam, why do you even want to be with me? I'm a squib now." Regulus was almost frightened as he asked her.

"I want to be with you because I can't live without you, Reg." Cammie brushed his face. "And I know what Thomas is going to offer you, and I don't want to look at a face I don't recognize."

"I'm not sure I want that either." Regulus admitted. Thomas had made the offer to him to get his magic back, but Regulus had baulked at looking different. "But if I'm not magical, then all of our future children after this one will be squibs."

"Reg, I don't give a shit whether you and our children can do magic or not. Just tell me you love me, and that you'll love our son." Cammie begged.

Regulus placed a hand on Cammie's belly. "I love you, and I love our son."

Cammie found his mouth again as he started to pull off her wet clothes and the two began to make love. It was almost dinnertime when they finally stepped out of the shower, and began to get ready.

Cammie slipped on the dress that someone had provided for her, finding it was a little tight, and she aimed her wand at it to let it out. "I should have packed before I ran."

"All of your clothes are still at the house." Regulus' own things were there as well.

"I don't think they're going to fit for much longer anyway since most of them can't be magically altered." Cammie bit her lip. "And I think that we're going to have to sell the house."

"We are." Regulus then explained that his trust funds now belonged to his son with Petra, before going further. "I have Muggle qualifications but they're in my real name, and I can hardly practice there or in the wizarding world anymore without Sirius or Sebastian finding out."

"We'll manage." Cammie knew they'd work something out. "I don't care as long as we're together." She let Regulus hold her for several long minutes, before he released her.

Regulus took her hand. "We'd better go and join Thomas and Lucy for dinner."

"Lucy Viking?" Cammie knew that the former Auror had joined Thomas, but like everyone else, she had no idea that Lucy wasn't exactly Thomas' ally.

"Yes." Regulus confirmed. "She's Thomas' assistant, and I suspect will eventually be Mione's replacement."

"She's not sleeping with him now?" Cammie asked.

"I don't know if she is or not yet." Regulus had the feeling that she might be, but he hadn't really discussed the girl with Thomas yet since she'd been in the room when he'd told Thomas what had happened.

Cammie was intrigued. "Let's go meet her then."

Thomas politely stood up as they both entered. "Are you well?"

Regulus smiled at Cammie, still holding her hand. "We couldn't be happier."

"A little overstated but I get the picture." Thomas sat down as Regulus held out Cammie's seat for her. "So have you thought about my offer?"

"The answer is no." Regulus linked his hand with Cammie's again. "Cam doesn't want it, and I agree."

"You're not bothered that Reg could get his magic back?" Thomas poured out wine for him, Lucy and Regulus and water for Cammie.

"He'd have to take someone else's life away, and that's intolerable." Cammie responded. "It's bad enough that you took lives to get him out."

Lucy smirked at Thomas. "Told you."

"Lucy, please shut up." Thomas' voice, however, wasn't harsh.

Lucy, as usual, ignored Thomas. "As if that's going to happen. Well, aren't you going to tell them what you've done?"

Cammie didn't know what to make of their discourse, and after her conversation with Regulus about Lucy, she asked pointblank. "Are the two of you together?"

"He hired me as his assistant." Lucy confirmed what Regulus had told Cammie. "Where he goes, I go."

"She's right." Regulus butted in. "Up until I was arrested, Lucy practically lived in Thomas' pocket. Maddie adores her."

"So you're not in a relationship then?" Cammie checked.

"No, we're not." Lucy responded, before Thomas could say anything. "I'm only here because Thomas took away my life, and I've had to rebuild a new one."

"Are you sure there's nothing between the two of you?" Cammie looked from one to the other, not willing to let the subject drop. "Because apart from with Aunt Mione, I've never seen Uncle Thomas be so, well, lenient for the want of a better word."

"He's sure." Lucy answered before Thomas could again.

As Thomas glared at Lucy, Regulus grinned. "I can't help but like you, Lucy. With me out of the picture, I need someone to take my place and keep him in order."

"That must be why I saved her. I knew one day I'd have to replace you." Thomas remarked in a sarcastic voice. "And look at what it got me."

"I think we're getting off the subject, Thomas." Lucy passed Thomas a folder. "Here, you can explain it to them."

Thomas opened the folder, and passed over several sheets to Regulus. "Reg, I want to employ you to work as a lawyer for me in San Francisco at the Seville Legal Group. I already have the paperwork necessary for you to make the transition to a Muggle lawyer there. It will be up to you to read up on what you need to know, but given that you've already passed the bar in New York, I don't perceive the exam you'll have to take as being a problem. "

"Sebastian will track me down, even there." Regulus pointed out.

"You're going to cut your hair, shave off your goatee, dress like a Muggle and change your name. You will literally fade into the

background as a Muggle." Thomas was more than aware that people only saw what they wanted to see; his own case being at point. "Your paperwork in your new name will reflect that you're qualified to practice in New York, as will the paperwork to transfer to San Francisco. And given what you've said about not wanting your magic back, I'll arrange to purchase a property for you in a Muggle district rather than the wizarding district as I intended to, and ensure that it's warded so that any magic that Cammie will use won't be detectable."

"Why are you doing this for me?" Regulus asked, his voice disbelieving.

"Would you do it for me if our positions were reversed?" Thomas countered with a question.

Regulus responded immediately. "Of course. You're my best friend."

"You've answered your own question then." Thomas told him.

"Thank you." Regulus felt choked.

"Now, you're both going to need new identification." Thomas returned to the practicalities of the matter ahead. "The papers have been adjusted to include Cammie; all they need are your new names."

"What was your great-grandmother's name?" Cammie asked Regulus as she twisted the ring around that he'd given her.

"Melania-Anne McMillan." Regulus guessed what Cammie was planning. "But everyone called her Grandy Melina."

"Not an option calling myself Grandy but I can use her first name. I'd like to change my name to Laine McMillan." Cammie spelt out the first name that she'd adapted from Grandy Melina's.

"I actually like the name my counterpart from Sebastian's world chose." Regulus admitted. "And you'd better change my last name to McMillan as well. Cam, you'll have to find a different last name until we get married."

"Married?" Cammie stared in amazement at Regulus.

"I really should have gotten down on one knee, shouldn't I?" Regulus ignored Thomas and Lucy's stares, and did exactly that, taking Cammie's hand. "Cam, I love you. Will you marry me?"

"Yes. A thousand times, yes." Cammie wrapped her arms around Regulus' neck and kissed him.

"So let me get this straight. You're getting married so Cammie will need a different last name, and you want to be known as Dae McMillan?" Thomas queried once Cammie had finished kissing Regulus.

Regulus nodded. "And it's also the last name Sirius would ever imagine me using. And I'd like to use Thomas for a middle name."

Thomas couldn't help but feel flattered. "Lucy will arrange for all the name changes to come into force in the morning. In the meantime, our dinner is getting cold."

The Next Morning

Reg sat on the deck and ate breakfast with Thomas; Cammie was still sleeping. "I really appreciate what you're doing."

"Are you sure you won't reconsider my offer about your magic?" Thomas checked.

"I can't, Thomas." Regulus refused yet again. "I know it's going to be hard but Cam doesn't want it, and she's more important to me than anything else."

"If you ever change your mind, let me know." Thomas sighed.

"What's wrong?" Regulus had seen Thomas in all sorts of moods, but he'd seemed almost distracted during dinner, and now he didn't look much happier either.

"I'm feeling a little jealous of you and Cammie, if you must know." Thomas revealed why he was so down.

"I thought you and Lucy you were getting along quite well." Regulus put down his orange juice. "Or am I wrong?"

"Lucy likes me, but she's definitely playing hard to get." Thomas had no idea that Lucy didn't like him in the slightest. "But it isn't Lucy that's bothering me. It's Mione."

"I thought you said you were over her." Regulus leant back in his chair.

"I am and I'm not." Thomas sighed heavily again. "Reg, I fucked up. I mean, I really fucked up."

Regulus had never heard Thomas speak like that before. "With Mione?"

"Yes." Thomas thought back to the conversation he'd had with his wife. "I pushed her into Lupin's arms."

"You treated her like a princess, Thomas." Regulus had seen the two of them together often enough to know that.

"No, I didn't." Thomas got to his feet, and moved to stand against the railing. "She didn't cheat on me."

"But she's pregnant with Lupin's kid." Regulus had been told by Cammie.

"She didn't sleep with him until after I found them together." Thomas revealed. "She told me when she brought Nat and Bella to stay with me."

"And you believed her?" Regulus got up to join Thomas.

"She swore an oath. Something she wanted to do the last time she saw me before she was rescued." Thomas didn't look at his friend, keeping his gaze fixed firmly on the horizon. "Reg, that last time I was

with her at Castrum House, I refused to let her swear an oath. Instead I forced her to have sex with me, and I made sure she responded. But when it was over, I told her that she hadn't even been worth paying. I wanted to hurt her as much as she'd hurt me."

Not entirely surprised by how Thomas had reacted, Regulus encouraged Thomas to open up more. "I think you'd better tell me what she told you."

So Thomas began to tell him what had happened once he and Mione had reached the privacy of the sun room on the day she'd brought the children to stay with him.

15th March 2012

Mione nervously followed Thomas into the sun room. "What do you want?"

"Not quite so pleasant now, are we?" Thomas' voice was no more pleasant than Mione's had been. "And I see you brought Sebastian with you. Lupin too afraid to come along?"

"Harry didn't want me to come here alone because of the condition I'm in." Mione folded her arms. "And I didn't think you'd appreciate Remus accompanying me."

"I wouldn't have, nor will I ever. At least I respect Sebastian, which is more than I can say for Lupin." Thomas looked at her stomach. "So you're expecting a boy?"

"It's Remus' baby before you start to jump to the wrong conclusion." Mione wrapped her hands around her stomach in a protective gesture. "On rare occasions male babies are fathered by werewolves."

"So you were fucking him after all?" Thomas' voice became silky, an indication that he was far from happy.

"No, I wasn't." Mione decided that it was time that he knew the truth, and pulled out her wand, before aiming it at herself. "I swear on my

life and my magic that I had never made love with Remus Lupin before you imprisoned us both at Castrum House."

Thomas, who, in spite of the oath he'd sworn not to attack his wife, had reflexively withdrawn his own wand, before lowering it and paling as the magic dissipated. "But I heard you talking about making love with him."

"You heard me telling Remus about my feelings for you. He was my best friend, and I'd already told him who you really were as I needed someone to confide in. When you turned up, I was telling him about how guilty I felt about making love with you." Mione had already asked Sirius to release her from her oath to him, aware that something like this might come up. "But when I tried to tell you that I hadn't slept with him, you refused to listen to me. And I'll never forgive you for what you put me through because of that."

"I'm so sorry, Mione." Thomas was absolutely horrified at what he'd done, and he went to reach out to touch his wife, only for her to draw back.

"It's too late for apologies. I don't want anything from you now." Mione just wanted her husband to know what he'd done. "But I do want you to know that I'm only with Remus now because of what you did to me. I needed someone to take away the memory of our last time together, and so I asked Remus to make love to me."

"Why him?" Thomas' face was now completely bereft of color.

"Because I didn't want my last time before I died to be with you." Mione let Thomas know exactly when she'd made love with Remus.

Thomas was absolutely staggered. "You had sex with him in your cell?"

"Yes." Mione smiled, and placed a hand on her stomach. "It's where our son was conceived, and even though the cell was the most disgusting and miserable place I've ever been in, Remus also made it the most beautiful."

Thomas grabbed at the table next to him, a feeling of complete despair washing over him, and his voice was choked as he asked his next question. "Do you love him?"

"Yes." Mione met Thomas' gaze, and was completely honest about her feelings. "But not like I loved you. I'd have done anything for you, Thomas, but you didn't trust me. You didn't even give me a chance. Not even when I offered to swear an oath to you." Mione's voice was distant as she recalled when she'd begged Thomas to let her prove she was telling the truth. "You almost destroyed me, Thomas, because you didn't love me enough."

"That's not true." Thomas rebutted Mione's words. "I loved you more than you'll ever know."

"I think the past tense is a correct way of phrasing the word 'love' because you've obviously moved on already, haven't you, Thomas?" Mione challenged his words, not wanting to dwell on what had happened at Castrum House between them.

"Yes." Thomas couldn't deny it.

"Do you love her?" Mione deliberately tested her own lingering feelings for Thomas, as she waited for his response.

"No." Thomas answered truthfully as Mione had. "But I could. I like her a great deal, and so does Maddie."

"I gathered that from the court case." Mione's response was sharp, as she found that Thomas still had the ability to hurt her, but it wasn't as painful as she'd thought it would be.

"Lucy cares a great deal about Maddie." Thomas felt the need to defend his assistant. "She's the one you've got to thank for my not telling Maddie who I am again yet."

Even though she believed that Lucy had defected, Mione sent a silent prayer of thanks to the former Auror. "When do you plan to tell Maddie who you are?"

"Soon." Thomas admitted.

"Don't do it, Thomas." Mione demanded. "With what's happened over the last few months, Maddie has had enough to deal with without you dumping that shit on her again."

"She's going to have to know eventually." Thomas pointed out.

As much as she hated to do it, Mione pleaded with Thomas, aware that he was currently feeling vulnerable and hurt. "Please don't tell her, Thomas. Despite our differences, and what's happened, if you ever truly cared about me, then do this one thing for me. Don't corrupt our daughter."

Reminded of how terribly he'd wronged Mione, Thomas paused before nodding tersely. "Very well. I won't tell her until she's old enough to be able to deal with the truth."

Mione sagged with relief. "Thank you." She then turned to leave. "I have to go. Remus will worry otherwise."

Thomas didn't like being reminded of Mione's new relationship, but as it was a situation of his making, he apologized to his wife again. "Mione, I really am sorry."

"As I said, it's too late for apologies, Thomas. I'd just appreciate it if, for the children's sake, we could be civilized when we meet." Mione rested her hand on the door handle. "So I'll be here on Sunday night to take Nat and Bella home."

"Would you like to take Maddie with you as well?" Thomas offered, his guilt compelling him to make the offer.

"I would." Mione was stunned. "But what about the court order? I'm not supposed to have her yet."

"We can ignore it for the time being. I'll get the order altered so that you can spend more time with Maddie, and I'll talk to her so that she doesn't run off again." Thomas knew he'd have to tell Maddie that it was his fault that he and Mione had parted. "I'll make sure she's

ready to go with you on Sunday, and you can bring her back to Grimmauld Square next Saturday morning. I'll change the wards to allow you to apparate in again. I'll also arrange for draft papers to be delivered to you so that you can look over the new custody arrangements before I file the papers with the Court."

"Thank you." Mione then let herself out of the room.

Thomas gave himself a few moments to recover before following his wife out.

Present Time

Regulus was completely astounded. "I don't know what to say."

"There's nothing to say." Thomas turned away from the view. "I fucked up, and I'm paying the price for it."

"Why didn't you let her swear the oath to you?" Regulus asked out of curiosity.

"I thought she was trying to escape the end I'd got planned for her." Thomas shook his head. "I almost killed her, Reg, and she'd done nothing wrong."

"And what about Lupin?" Regulus asked after the werewolf.

"I hate him." Thomas said bluntly. "And if I get the chance, I'll kill him."

Regulus had expected Thomas to be unreasonable about Remus, even though the situation hadn't been the man's fault. "And Mione?"

"I can't hurt her in the children's presence, but I now wouldn't anyway." Thomas knew he'd never lift a finger against his wife ever again. "How I treated her was beyond contempt, and I owe her a debt I doubt I can ever repay."

Cammie chose that moment to come out. "Good morning."

Mindful of how miserable Thomas was obviously feeling, Regulus went over to her and kissed her cheek rather than pulling her into his arms. "Good morning."

"Excuse me." Thomas smiled briefly at the pair before going inside.

Castrum House

H.J. knocked tentatively on his wife's door. "Hermione?" When he didn't get an answer, he let himself in, to find the room empty. He was about to go back downstairs when he spotted an envelope with his name on it. Opening it up, he sank down onto the bed to read it. It was brief and to the point.

'H.J.

Even though I love you, I can't stay in a marriage where I no longer feel as though I know or can trust my husband. So I'm leaving. DO NOT try to find me. I've taken precautions to hide my tracks. I've taken Sevvvy with me, but I'll make arrangements for you to see him once I've found somewhere to stay.

I'm sorry.
Hermione'

Next Chapter: Thomas springs a surprise; Mione takes an important step; An opportunity arises to liberate Hogwarts.

Chapter 81: End of Days

1st May 2012

Lucy met Harry in the garden. "Give this note to Commander Sebastian."

"What does it say?" Harry asked, a little puzzled why she hadn't just told him the message.

"It's private." Lucy started to walk away. "Do it soon."

2nd May 2012

After reading the note, Harry swore. "Fuck."

"May I ask what it says?" Harry Potter was still curious.

Harry handed the note over. "I'm presuming that you knew and couldn't tell me."

"Actually, I didn't but Lucy obviously believed I did, and that I wouldn't be able to tell you verbally because of my oath." Harry Potter handed the note back. "He kept that quiet."

"Not quiet enough." Harry pocketed the note. "Thanks for this. I'd better go stop a leak."

Harry disappeared, and put his head around Edwina Jericho's door. "I need you for something important. Can you come into my office in five minutes?"

Edwina frowned. "I was about to leave, Sir. My husband was expecting me an hour ago, and I still need to stop off on my way home to pick up some groceries. Is it something that could wait until tomorrow?"

Harry shook his head. "I'm afraid not. Five minutes, Edwina."

"Yes, Sir." When the door closed, Edwina rolled her eyes, and started to take off her cloak.

When Edwina knocked on Harry's door five minutes later, Harry opened it and held out a hand towards the chair in front of his desk. "Sit down, Edwina."

"Thank you, Sir." Edwina Jericho sat down as directed. "So what do you want to talk to me about?"

Harry sat down behind his desk. "Before I begin, I have to inform you that this is a formal interview."

"A formal interview, Sir?" Edwina wondered what she'd done wrong. "I thought my performance so far has been more than satisfactory."

"It has, Edwina." Harry had a record of her employment in front of him. "But it's not your performance I wish to speak to you about. I want to talk to you about how long you've been working for Dominus."

"I beg your pardon, Sir." Edwina acted surprised. "Why would you think I've been working for him?"

"Because only ten people knew the whereabouts of Regulus Black's safe house." Harry went on to list them. "Myself, the Minister, Aurors Tracery, Montgomery, Kirk, Bridges and Schuler, Regulus Black himself, and you. Now Dominus killed the four guards, and it couldn't have been Regulus Black who told Dominus, so that leaves Auror Tracery, me, the Minister and you, Edwina."

"Auror Tracery doesn't fall under suspicion, Sir?" Edwina questioned Harry's reduced list. "Or perhaps one of the guards who was killed."

"Auror Tracery has my trust. As did the guards at Black's safe house." Harry didn't include Sirius. "Which really just leaves you." Harry got up and sat on the edge of the desk. "You've been taking emotional suppressant to put me off the scent, haven't you?"

"I really don't know what you're talking about, Sir." Edwina responded.

"Let me make it a little clearer for you then." Harry stared down Edwina. "I'm a werewolf, Edwina. And I don't believe for one minute that Dominus hasn't told you that."

"I didn't know, Sir." Edwina sat impassively.

"Most people who understand what that comment means would be falling off their chair to get away from me right now." Harry correctly observed. "Even with the small amount of emotional suppressant you're taking, you'd show some sort of reaction at news like that but you're not showing a thing. No emotion; no reaction; nothing. You already knew."

"That proves nothing except for the fact that I'm not afraid of you." Edwina argued.

"Normally I might accept that answer but when you've been seen in Castrum House, it puts a different light on things." Harry told her.

"How could anyone have seen me if I'm supposed to be a Death Eater, Sir?" Edwina continued to challenge Harry's statements. "They all wear masks."

"Not true; some don't care if they show their faces." Harry knew that only too well. "I've been inside Castrum House, so I know that for a fact. But you didn't show your face; at least not until you were in Dominus' presence, and the presence of a member of his Inner Circle."

"And she told you I suppose?" Edwina's voice changed to reflect her scorn.

"They sent me a note." Harry picked up a piece of paper from his desk. "Amongst other things, it says 'Jericho is your leak'."

Edwina stood up. "I think this persecution has gone far enough. I'm leaving, Sir."

"No, you are not." Harry snapped. "So sit down or I'll make you sit down."

Edwina was only too well aware of Harry's capabilities, and she sank down onto her chair. "That note proves nothing."

"It proves everything." Harry placed the piece of paper back on the desk. "You see, you just said 'she told you', and not 'he' as most people would. Now as my operative inside Dominus' organization is a woman, you have to understand that your defense is fast becoming a sinking ship."

"It was just an expression." Edwina started to defend herself as she readied herself to draw her wand.

Harry had noticed the movement, and ignored it. "No, it's not. And we both know it. So if you come clean to me, I'll consider being lenient with the recommendation as to your sentence."

Edwina's wand flew into her hand. "Avada Kedavra."

Harry didn't move, and he wasn't surprised by the shocked look on her face. "The magic in this room has been nullified, Jericho. A trick I stole from your master." Harry withdrew his own wand. "Incarcerous."

"He's going to beat you." Edwina hissed.

"So I've heard before." Harry came to stand in front of the young woman. "Edwina Jericho, you're under arrest as an accessory in the escape of the prisoner, Regulus Black. You are also being charged as an accessory to murder in the deaths of Aurors Montgomery, Kirk, Bridges and Schuler, as well as for the attempted murder of a senior officer of BritAD. You will be taken from here to be held until your trial, and a substantiated copy of my memory of this conversation will be admitted as evidence. Under the circumstances, I have little choice except to recommend the death penalty. However, you will have the opportunity to mount a defense, and I will appoint someone to provide that defense. Is there anything you wish to say?"

Edwina said nothing, and so Harry walked to the door and called in the two waiting Unspeakables. "Take her to Safe House Gamma Four. You will remain with her at all times until her trial tomorrow, and

you will not leave under any circumstances. Unspeakable Omega will join you to talk to the prisoner as her defender. I will see you at 9am to escort her back here. If anyone except for Omega and myself attempt to access the safe house then you must consider them a threat, and act accordingly. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Commander." The two men grabbed an arm each and marched the silent woman out.

Harry then went into Julianne Tracery's office. "I know it's getting late but could you possibly arrange for someone to send a message to Edwina's husband that she won't be home tonight. Something important has come up."

"Of course, Sir." Julianne made a note on her pad. "I'm leaving as soon as I've finished this report, so I can do it."

"You do enough." Harry had been impressed by how diligent Julianne was, pushing herself even when her old injuries began to plague her. "Go home, and give that message to one of the trainees to deliver."

"Thank you, Sir." Julianne closed the folder on her desk as Harry left her office, and he headed towards the Ministerial section of the wing.

Sirius stood up as his door opened. "Harry, what can I do for you?"

"I've discovered that Edwina Jericho is the leak we've been seeking. I'd therefore like a trial arranged for 9.30am tomorrow, Minister. Under Regulation 947.23 I have issued Jericho a defender. However, as I consider this matter to fall under Regulation 23.7, and is most definitely on a need to know basis only, her trial is to be held without a jury, and will need to be officiated by you in your position as Minister as both judge and jury." Harry's voice was cold and formal; his negative feelings towards Sirius still very apparent.

"Before I can agree to the Regulation being enforced, I need to know the charges, to see a copy of your memory of the interview, and to receive your recommendation." Sirius outlined what he wanted.

Harry told him what Edwina had been arrested for, as well as placing a copy of his memory into a vial. Then, with a heavy heart, he gave his recommendation. "I'm going to be asking for the death penalty. And even though Jericho is responsible for at least four deaths that I am aware of, in the light of keeping Viking safe, I'd prefer it if Jericho's death was listed as in the line of duty, and her records sealed."

Sirius knew that it irked Harry to ask for that. "If I believe the case warrants such actions, then I will follow your recommendation. Who will be carrying out the sentence if I believe the findings warrant the death penalty?"

"As chief enforcer and head of BritAD, I will, Minister." Harry wasn't going to ask someone else to do his duty. "And I believe that now concludes everything on this matter."

Sirius stood up. "Harry, don't you think this has gone on long between us?"

"No. Now if you'll excuse me, Minister. I have things to do." Harry turned around and walked out.

The next day, after speaking with Sirius again, who this time didn't try to plead with him, Harry made a note in Jericho's file - 'killed in action', and closed and sealed her file. He then picked up his cloak, and left to tell her husband that his wife had died.

28th June 2012

Mione gave one final push, her nails driving into Remus' hand as she brought her son into the world. "Is he alright?"

Her question was answered by a wail that let the room know that her son wasn't happy. The midwife quickly cleaned the baby up, weighed him, and wrapped him up before passing him to Mione, who by now had tears running down her cheeks. "He's so beautiful, Remus."

"You both are." Remus kissed Mione's forehead. "You did so well."

"I'm glad you were here." Mione hadn't expected to go into labor five weeks early, and she'd been terrified that something was wrong, but Remus had stayed with her through the whole thing. "I couldn't have done it without you."

"Yes, you could but I'm glad you didn't." Remus gently stroked his son's cheek. "It meant so much to me to be here."

A short time later, Mione was cleaned up as well, and tucked up in bed, her son being held by Remus. "What are we going to call him?"

"I like your choice of Logan." Remus smiled down at his sleeping son. "He looks like a Logan."

"Then we'll make it Logan Remus Lupin." Mione wanted Remus' own name to be passed onto his son.

"I'd like that." Remus gently maneuvered Logan into Mione's arms. "You really are amazing."

"You're only saying that because I've just given birth to your son." Mione teased.

"I'm saying it because it's true." Remus sat on the edge of the bed. "I complain about the change I go through but compared to eighteen hours of labor, it doesn't quite compare."

"If I had a choice between lupinism and childbirth, I'd go with the childbirth." Mione quipped. "But I don't think I could go through that again anytime soon."

Remus became serious. "Would you like more children?"

"Yes." Mione's voice quavered as she took in the sight of her son. "Who wouldn't? Just look at him. He's so perfect."

"Like his mother." Remus leaned over and softly kissed Mione's lips.

Mione responded for a moment, before drawing away, and smiling. "His Dad isn't bad either."

Remus got up from the bed. "I think it's time I told everyone outside about the new arrival."

Mione yawned. "Will you put him in his crib? Everyone can come and look but I doubt I'll be awake much longer."

Remus settled Logan down, and stood for a few minutes just watching his son sleeping. He'd been just as awed when Emily had been born, but had missed out on Sophia's birth because of his split with Buffy. When he turned around, Mione was sleeping. Smiling, he quietly let himself out of the room.

30th June 2012

Cassandra smiled in triumph. "I think I've solved the first part of the dimensional switching problem, Harry."

"Brilliant." Harry put down the book he was reading. "How long before you get it finished?"

"Vanishing cabinets are notoriously difficult to manipulate, and Thomas' alterations are confusing and complicated. And it's slow going as some of it is trial and error, so I'd say two months tops. Once I get to the bottom of what he's done, I'll need access again to the vanishing cabinet that Thomas has here to test my findings." Cassandra slipped her notes back into the book she'd been reading. "And I'll also need a knife to draw my blood."

"Why do you need blood?" Harry's concentration was now fully on what Cassandra was telling him.

"Because to tie this vanishing cabinet into the one in the Black family vault, it needs my blood." Cassandra explained. "But before I do all of this, I need Dad to transfer it out of the vault, so that I can run tests. I also need to re-read the notes you gave me, so that I can start on the next part of the problem."

"It's going to have to wait a little longer because Thomas is expecting us in twenty minutes." Harry hadn't realized it was so late until he'd glanced up at the clock. "So you'd better get a move on."

"I don't see why I need to go anyway." Cassandra grumbled as she got up.

"Because you're my dinner partner, and Thomas has demanded you attend." Harry said softly. "Now off you go."

Half an hour later, Harry apologized to Thomas. "Sorry we're late but Cassandra couldn't decide what to wear."

"You made a good choice, Cassandra." Thomas thought the black low cut gown suited Cassandra. "You remember Lucy, don't you?"

"She's hard to forget." Cassandra almost hissed at the girl, playing her part perfectly. "How are you, Lucy?"

"Very well." Lucy's voice became cold as she too played her expected role. "I can see that I don't have to ask how you are."

Thomas decided to break things up. "Now, now, ladies. Cassandra, can I steal you from Harry? I have some people I'd like you to meet. Harry, take care of Lucy for me." Thomas led Cassandra off into the main reception room, leaving Harry and Lucy alone.

Harry knew he'd been assigned Lucy's care as Thomas was still trying to encourage the two of them to become friends. Thomas had no way of knowing that Lucy no longer felt the hate she once had for her fellow werewolf, as her feelings towards Harry had slowly changed as they'd met several times a week since their first meeting. Casting a hurried privacy spell, he warned her. "I can smell another werewolf, and I don't recognize the scent. Don't say or do anything out of place."

"I've already spotted him, but I'm sure Thomas will introduce you." Lucy took Harry's arm and let her lead him into the room.

Inside the reception room, Cassandra drew to a halt at the sight that met her eyes. Thomas knew why she'd stopped. "Destin, I do believe that you already know Cassandra Sebastian."

"Cassandra, how lovely to see you." Destin took her hand and kissed it.

Cassandra was almost speechless when Thomas reintroduced her to his next guest. "Nathan, you too must remember Cassandra."

"It's a pleasure to see you again." Nathan smiled at Cassandra. "Thomas mentioned that you'd joined the club."

Harry made his way over to Cassandra, possessively placing an arm around her waist, but leaving his other hand behind Lucy's back. "And she makes a very lovely addition." He released Cassandra and held out his hand. "I'm sorry, we haven't been introduced. I'm Harry Potter."

"Nathan Bradford." Nathan shook Harry's hand. "I take care of Thomas' problems on the East Coast."

Harry was reeling to see the head of USAD's husband but hid his surprise. "It's nice to meet you."

Thomas then introduced the man that Harry had recognized as a werewolf. "This is Destin Simon. Deputy Head of French Auror Division."

Harry knew exactly who this man was as well, having seen Harry Sebastian's memories of his demonstration fight at USAD, and he held out his hand. "Harry Potter. I take it you take care of Thomas' little problems in France."

"Not just France but most of Europe." Destin announced proudly.

"I have to admit it comes as quite a surprise to find you here." Harry knew that the werewolf would have detected his shock.

Destin shrugged. "It is a matter of survival, Harry. One day soon, it will be the end of the world for those who stand against Thomas, and I want to be on the right side when that happens."

Harry, Lucy and Cassandra were all startled as they heard the password that identified an ally but none of them showed it on their faces. Harry decided to see if it had just been a chance comment. "I wouldn't exactly call it the end of the world per se. It's not exactly Armageddon we're looking at."

"But I believe that the Muggles will call it an end of days." Destin responded. "But onto more important things." He put his arm around the woman next to him. "This is my colleague, Claudette Maigny."

Cassandra went through the motions as Thomas introduced both her and Harry to numerous people in the room, her heart sinking as she realized that Thomas' efforts were most definitely not just limited to the UK.

It was only once they were back in their bedroom, that she turned to Harry. "Did you know about this?"

"No." Harry had been as taken aback as she was. "He's obviously been building up his little empire behind the scenes. He doesn't just have an Inner Circle here; he obviously has one in every major continent all around the world. How did we not notice?"

"Thomas is cleverer than we gave him credit for." Cassandra blew out her breath, and passed Harry a note. "Destin slipped this into my hand when he kissed it, just before we left."

Harry opened it.

'Cassandra

If you're interested, meet me in the rose garden at midnight.

Destin.'

Harry then threw the note onto the fireplace. "Anyone reading it would believe that he wants an assignation with you behind my back."

"I'll need you to place silencing and invisibility spells over me that are time-locked." If for any reason she was found, Cassandra didn't want to get caught carrying a wand as it would place both Harry and Destin under suspicion.

"I'll do it." Harry ran his hand over the back of his neck. "But I'll follow you, and listen in as well. And if you need protection, then I'll provide it."

Agreeing to Harry's idea, Cassandra changed into something more suitable for sneaking around, and just before midnight, she set out for the rose garden. The meeting, however, didn't take place, as when Cassandra slipped silently into the garden, she spotted Claudette walking with Destin and she had no idea if Claudette could be trusted or not. Deciding not to take a chance, she slipped away just as quietly, aware that Harry was probably doing the same.

16th August 2012

Mione lay feeding her son as Remus came into her bedroom. "Hi."

"Hi." Remus kept his voice low, as he sat on the edge of the bed. "How's it going?"

"Wonderfully." Mione yawned. "Although it is tiring."

"I'll take the rest of his feeds for tonight." Remus offered. Mione had been unable to feed Logan naturally, so they'd had to resort to bottles.

"Thanks." Mione picked up Logan and popped him over her shoulder to burp him. "I'd forgotten how much I loved doing this."

Remus scooted onto the bed beside Mione. "You're not the only one."

Logan gave an almighty burp just as Mione decided to pass him to his father. She grinned. "He's definitely your son."

Remus snorted. "You would say that."

"I'm a lady, and ladies don't burp." Watching Remus tuck Logan into the crook of his arm, Mione experienced a warm feeling. "You're so good with him."

"I've had practice." Remus reminded her, and he lifted his arm up. "Come here."

Mione snuggled up to Remus' chest. "Remus, what are going to do?"

"About what?" Remus tried to narrow down the ambiguous question.

"Us." Mione placed her hand over his.

"Mione, there's only an us if you want to there to be one." Remus had had the same conversation with her quite a few times since Logan was born. "You know how I feel about you, but I'm not going to pressure you. However, I won't lie and say that I don't want there to be an us, because I do. But I only want it if it's truly what you want, and not because I fathered a child with you." Remus glanced down at his son whose eyelashes were fluttering down over his cheeks, sleep taking him away from the conscious world. "Let me just put him down."

Mione sat up to let Remus get up and put Logan in the crib in the corner of the room. When he lay back down, she curled back up to him. "I'm scared, Remus."

Remus could feel Mione's apprehension. "What about?"

Mione turned and looked into his eyes. "This." She knew that Remus would understand what she was trying to say.

"You don't have to be." Remus brushed his lips over hers. "I'll never hurt you, Mione. Never."

"Promise?" Mione trembled as she asked.

"I promise." Remus cradled the back of Mione's head, as they shared a kiss.

Mione placed a hand on Remus' chest as the kiss deepened. Since Logan's birth they'd shared several similar moments, and Mione had found herself wanting more. "Remus, will you make love to me?"

Remus, as he had at Castrum House, found himself checking if this was what Mione truly desired. "Are you sure that this is what you want?"

"Yes." At her words, Mione found herself being rolled onto her back; Remus lying over her as he began to kiss her.

Unlike their time together in the cell, this was a tenderer, more gentle and loving experience, and when it was over, Remus held Mione against him. "I love you."

"And I love you." Mione knew that it wasn't the gut-wrenching and soul-filled love she'd felt for Thomas, but it was love nevertheless.

Remus knew that Mione's love for him wasn't what he'd hoped for; the fact that he hadn't marked her being the obvious pointer. However, he could feel Mione's emotions, and he felt closer to her than he ever had before. "Mione, when all of this is over, I want to marry you."

Mione heart skipped a beat. "Marry me?"

"Yes." Remus said softly. "I'm never going to feel about anyone the way I feel about you, and now that we're finally together, I want to make it permanent."

Mione didn't respond straightaway, as she thought about Remus and her feelings for him. "Logically I know that it's the next step but I'm not ready to commit yet."

Remus didn't push the issue. "Then I'll ask again when all of this is over, and for the moment we'll just get used to this."

Mione, as she always did, moved onto the more practical issues that their sleeping together brought up. "Are we going to keep separate bedrooms?"

"That's entirely up to you." Again, Remus wasn't going to force anything on Mione.

"I'd like to share your room." Mione blushed as she told him, but she loved the feeling of being held in the night, and the security that feeling brought.

"Then we'll move you and Logan into my room." Remus reached out and switched off the light. "But for now let's just go to sleep."

Exhausted from taking care of Logan, and making love, Mione was asleep within minutes. Remus, however, lay awake late into the night, smiling as he relished the feeling of just being able to hold the woman he loved more than life itself.

20th August 2012

Luna hummed happily to herself as she came out of the restroom. Her humming stopped as she came face to face with a woman with a small baby in her arms, and a stroller in front of her. "Cammie!"

Cammie paled, and began to back up. "Oh Merlin."

"Please, don't go." Luna pleaded. "We've all been so worried about you."

Cammie pulled out her wand. "I'm not going back."

Luna didn't have her wand with her, and keeping her voice steady and low, as she would with one of the frightened animals she treated at the cetacean institute she now worked at, she tried to reassure Cammie. "I'm not going to tell anyone I saw you."

"You will." Cammie's voice was shaking. "And we'll lose him again. I'm sorry, Luna, but I'm going to have to obliviate you."

Luna held out a hand. "Please, Cammie. Don't do that. Let's just go for a coffee, and we can talk."

Cammie shook her head. "No. You'll tell Uncle Harry."

Not having her wand with her, Luna gave Cammie the only reassurance she could that she wouldn't do that. "I swear on my children's lives that I only want to talk to you. I won't try and contact anyone, and if you want to obliviate me after we've finished, then I'll let you."

Cammie was hesitant as it wasn't a magical oath, but she knew how much Luna loved her children, and such an oath wasn't something Luna would make lightly. "Okay, but I'll choose somewhere, and if afterwards I think it's necessary, I will obliviate you."

"Lead the way." Luna held open the door so that Cammie could push the stroller out.

During coffee Cammie told Luna that Thomas had helped Regulus to escape but not where they were living. "I only went into the supermarket to get something readymade to put in the oven for dinner, and I was in the restroom because Sam needed changing. I didn't expect to run into you, as I know you live across the Bay."

Luna's eyebrows went up. "You're living as a Muggle?"

"Yes." Cammie admitted. "Reg refused Thomas' offer of getting his magic back."

Luna was surprised to hear that as everyone, including Harry Potter, had believed that Regulus had his magic back, and had gone into hiding with Cammie. Lucy, for once, had been unable to tell Harry anything different, as she'd sworn an oath at Cammie's request. "And you're living here in San Francisco?"

"I'd say no, but it would be obvious I'm lying. We've got a house in Pacific Heights." Cammie named one of the most expensive areas to live in in San Francisco, before shaking her head. "I don't even know

why I'm telling you this or why even I agreed to have a coffee with you, Luna. I'm going to have to oblivate you anyway."

"You're here because you obviously need more than just Regulus. I'm your friend, and I love you." Luna reached out and placed her hand over Cammie's hand. "And I'll give you an oath not to tell anyone I found you, if you agree to come with me when we've finished this coffee."

Cammie couldn't deny that she'd missed having someone else to turn to. "Where?"

"To your Mum's apartment. She's renting a tiny place in the Mission District." Luna revealed. "She's watching the boys for me."

Cammie was confused "Mum's living here, in San Francisco?"

"She left H.J. just after you fled." Luna could see that her words had shocked Cammie. "She couldn't trust him after what he did to you."

A look of despair crossed Cammie's face. "I've ruined their marriage."

"You haven't." Luna took Cammie's hand. "Come with me, and talk to your Mum."

Hermione called out as she heard the door open. "Luna, is that you? The boys are taking a nap."

"Hi Mum." Cammie stepped into the room, and her eyes filled with tears as she set eyes on her mother.

"Baby." Hermione rushed over and pulled Cammie into her arms, tears in her own eyes as well. "I've been so worried about you."

Cammie could feel Hermione shaking, and guilt washed over her. "'I'm sorry, Mum. I've missed you so much."

"I've missed you too." Wiping her tears away, as she heard a baby gurgle, Hermione looked behind Cammie. "Is he yours?"

Cammie turned around, and took her son from Luna's arms. "Yes. He was born on 3rd July. Mum, meet your grandson, Samuel Dae McMillan."

"You changed your name?" Hermione took her grandson off her daughter, her face taking on a doting look as she took in Sam's little face.

"We had to change our names." Cammie sat down as Hermione and Luna did. "Uncle Harry would have tracked us down otherwise. I'm only here now because Luna told me that you were here, and she's going to swear that she won't tell anyone she's seen me."

"I won't either." Hermione didn't care about the ethics of her hurried agreement; she just didn't want her daughter leaving her again. "And it's not as if I'm going to see H.J. or Harry anytime soon."

Cammie questioned her mother when Hermione brought up H.J.'s name. "Why did you leave Dad?"

"Because love isn't always enough." Hermione was now able to talk about her marriage without breaking down in tears. "After what H.J. did to you, I couldn't stay with him."

"Where's Sevvie?" Cammie asked after her little brother.

"With H.J." Hermione had portkeyed to New York to deliver her son to H.J., and H.J. had met her there. "He's spending the month with him before school starts. Luna's going to collect him for me."

"Mum, I don't want you to ruin your life because of me." Cammie pleaded with her mother. "Go back to Dad."

Hermione shook her head. "You may have been the catalyst but you weren't the problem, Cammie. H.J. forgot what was important, and I can't get over the fact that he put his job over his family. It's too late anyway, I'm thinking of getting a divorce. I just haven't gotten around to sorting a lawyer out yet. And I have a job at a local hospital, and I'm also attending night school."

"Mum, reconsider." Cammie didn't want her parents' marriage to end.

"No." Hermione refused. "Luna has spent the last month trying to get me to change my mind, and I can't."

Cammie recognized the same resolute attitude she'd had when Harry Potter had offered to marry her, and so instead she made Hermione an offer. "Then let me help." Cammie then told her mother and Luna what Regulus was doing. "So if I ask Reg, he'd handle your divorce."

"I don't know." Hermione was hesitant to let a former Death Eater do that for her. "Let me think about it."

After Hermione and Luna had both sworn oaths, even though Cammie had backtracked and told them that they didn't need to because she trusted them, the three women then spent the afternoon talking. Eventually however, Cammie got up. "I have to get home, Mum. Reg is due back soon, and he'll worry if I'm not there." Cammie hugged her mother, and made a request of her. "Mum, I want you to come to Sam's baptism."

"Baptism?" Hermione questioned her daughter.

"It's a Muggle baptism." Cammie explained. "I go to church every Sunday now, as does Reg."

Luna's mouth fell open. "You can't be serious."

"Wendy and Joe, our immediate neighbors took us the first time." Cammie smiled. "It's all part of fitting in."

Hermione thought of her own upbringing. "Is it a Catholic church?"

"Yes." Cammie was aware of how important that was to her mother. "Luna, I'd like you and Xander to come as well. There's only one problem."

Luna guessed straightaway. "Seville will be there, won't he?"

"Reg asked him to be Sam's godfather, and although my husband will usually give me anything, he wouldn't back down on this." Cammie and Regulus had had several heated arguments over it, but in the end she'd given in. "I haven't asked anyone to be his godmother yet. I was going to ask Wendy but I'd much rather it was you."

"I'd probably have to come alone." Luna knew Xander only too well, and how he'd react. "You know what Xander's like."

Cammie did. "I'd like it if he could come as well, Luna. I've missed him."

Luna was conscious that Xander would kick up an almighty fuss about things, but he rarely refused her anything in the end. "I'll get him to come around but it might not be in time for the baptism." She giggled. "Then again, I could wear his favorite outfit to bed one night."

Cammie burst out laughing. "It's always about sex with you, isn't it?"

"Always." Luna grinned at her. "When is the baptism?"

"In a month." Cammie gave her the date. "If you can get Xander to change his mind, please bring him." She turned to Hermione. "Mum, please also think about it."

"I'll be there." Hermione didn't need to think about it. "At least I know Thomas can't lift a finger to hurt me."

Cammie was confused by Hermione's statement. "Why not?"

"When I was at his wedding to Mione, I was attacked by a guest. Thomas had to extend his protection to me because of it." Hermione explained, not telling her daughter that Draco Malfoy had actually intended to rape her. "And that protection will always stand."

"We should have given you a wand and sent you to kill him." Cammie quipped, before becoming serious. "Mum, I have a more immediate request of you, and I'll understand if you say no. I want you to come to dinner on Sunday at one; talk to Reg, and see that he's not the

same person he was. Luna, if you and Xander want to, you can come as well."

Luna was more than curious to see how the former Death Eater was dealing with living his life as a Muggle, and she also wanted to offer Hermione her support. "I'm not going to be able to talk Xander around by then, but I'd like to come. I'll ask him to take care of the boys. Give me your address."

Cammie reeled it off. "Mum?"

Hermione felt nervous at the idea, but reminded herself that while Regulus could no longer do magic, she could, and Luna would be there. "I'll be there."

Cammie gave Hermione a large hug. "Thanks. I love you, Mum."

"I love you too." Hermione released her daughter, before opening the door so that Luna, Cammie and their children could leave.

As Cammie stood by Luna's car, she had a question for Luna. "I can understand why Mum swore not to tell anyone where I am. Why did you?"

"Because if I was in your shoes, and it was Xander in Regulus' position, I'd do the same as you. So even though I don't agree with what you're doing, and I do think that Regulus should be locked up, as I've spent the last three months or so comforting your mother, I don't want to have to do it again if you were discovered." Luna hated deceiving everyone else, but she knew that if she told anyone, Cammie would end up in New Azkaban, as would Regulus. "And you have a son now. And he needs his parents."

"Thanks, Luna." Cammie hugged the blond woman. "Give Xander my love, and tell him I really want him to come to the baptism."

"I'll make him swear an oath to keep quiet, whether he agrees to attend or not." Luna grinned wickedly. "Even if I have to beat one of out of him with a whip."

"Too much information." Cammie kissed Luna's cheek again. "I'll be in touch." She watched Luna pull away from the kerb, and she shuddered as a car beeped its horn at the young woman, as it narrowly missed her. As Cammie watched Luna's car roar off, she decided never to get into a car with her. Making sure that Sam was tucked safely into his stroller she decided to take a shortcut, and slipped down a side road and vanished.

2nd September 2012

Lucy handed Harry a piece of paper. "There's a baptism Thomas has to attend at the end of this month. It might provide the opening you've been waiting for."

Harry read the details and committed them to memory before burning the paper. "It just might. How are you doing?"

"I'm coping." Lucy and Harry both heard footsteps. "Go."

Harry vanished, and a few moments later, Thomas found Lucy sitting by the pond that she'd agreed to meet Harry by. "I thought I saw you come this way."

"I wanted to watch the sunset." Lucy rose from the bench. "But if you need me, I can come in."

"No." Thomas pulled her back down onto the bench. "Sunsets aren't really my thing, but we can sit and watch it together."

As Lucy was held against Thomas' side, she was glad that Harry had had the sense to use an invisibility spell. Thomas cast a privacy spell. "You can take your mask off now."

Almost as soon as she'd placed her mask on the bench, Thomas' mouth closed over hers, his hand sliding under her blouse. Telling herself she could do this, Lucy let him cup her breast, and kissed him back, just as she had been doing over the last few months. When his hand eventually moved to her leg, and glided up and under her skirt, Lucy continued to chant the same mantra in her head 'I can do this'.

However, it soon became too much for her, and she pushed him away. "Stop."

"If I didn't know better, I'd think you were a virgin." Thomas kept his hand on Lucy's thigh, but didn't attempt to move it any higher.

"I am a virgin." Lucy revealed. "And don't even begin to mention my age."

Thomas straightened up. "You've never slept with anyone before?"

"Technically no." Lucy confirmed. "I've never gone much further than we have now."

"Why not?" Thomas was curious.

"Because it's never been the right person, the right place or the right time." Lucy listed a number of reasons. "And I'm aware that to some people it's not a big deal, but to me it is."

"Then we'll wait until it is the right time and place." Thomas handed Lucy her mask. "Let's go back inside."

As the sun was now setting, Lucy followed him in.

4th September 2012

H.J. signed the divorce papers and handed them back to Luna. "Tell her I still love her, and want her back."

"H.J., she's made a new life for herself now." Luna placed the papers her friend had asked her to deliver into her pocket. "And she won't change her mind. Believe me, I've tried."

"I thought that I was doing the right thing." H.J. wished beyond everything that he could turn back the clock again but he knew that this time he couldn't.

"I believe you." Luna reached out and took H.J.'s hand. "But Hermione told me that after her parents' treatment of her, she couldn't

accept that you'd treated Cammie in what she felt was the same way."

H.J. uncrumpled the letter that he'd crushed and read it again.

'Dear H.J.

Please sign the papers. I need to be able to put us behind me, and while we're still married I can't do that.

If you love me as you say you do, then do this for me.

Hermione'

H.J. closed his eyes. "She doesn't love me anymore, does she?"

"She does." Luna knew that only too well. "But she said that a marriage without trust isn't a marriage."

"Then tell her if she ever needs me, I'll be here." H.J. got up. "Excuse me."

September 12th 2012

Cassandra opened her eyes as she heard the bedroom door opening. "So where did you get to last night?"

"I had things to do." Harry pulled off his boots. "I'm going for a shower."

"Harry, is that a lovebite on your neck?" Cassandra could see a dark bruise.

Harry slapped his hand to his neck. "It might be."

Happy, Cassandra sat up. "I'm so pleased for you."

"Don't be." Harry pulled his shirt over his head.

"Why not?" Cassandra could see scratch marks all down Harry's back. "You must have had a good time. She left her calling card all over your back."

Harry turned so that he could see his back in the mirror. "She did, didn't she? I barely felt it."

Cassandra was now intrigued. "So, are you going to tell me who she is?"

Harry refused. "No."

"You didn't sleep with a student, did you?" Cassandra was aware that several of the seventh year Slytherins were more than interested in Harry, even though they had no idea who lay behind the mask.

"It doesn't matter who it was. It was a one-night stand." Harry informed her.

"Harry, you can't keep punishing yourself like this." Cassandra said gently. "Cammie would want you to move on, and find someone else."

"Cassandra, just drop it." Harry opened the bathroom door and stepped inside. Closing the door behind him before Cassandra could say anything more, Harry removed the rest of his clothes before spelling the shower on, and stepping into it.

September 14th 2012

Cassandra stood nervously in the room of requirement. "Do you have the knife?"

Harry handed it over. "I'll heal the cut as soon as you've dripped your blood into the receptacle."

Gritting her teeth, Cassandra held her hand over the tiny hollow that existed in the base of the vanishing cabinet, and quickly drew the knife across her palm. "Ouch." Tilting her hand so that the blood

dripped down, she quickly began to incant the spell she'd need. "Black Familius Grimmauld Place Concateno Armarium."

As she finished the spell, Harry healed her hand, and then placed a small bird into the cabinet. "Let's hope this works."

A sound came from inside the box moments later, and Harry pulled it open, and smiled. "Hello, boss."

"Harry." Harry Sebastian jumped down from the step. "Hello, Cass."

"Hello." Cassandra stood quivering, a tear falling down her cheek.

Moments later Harry bridged the gap, holding his wife firmly against him as she burst into happy tears. "I've got you. It's going to be alright, Cass."

"I thought I'd never see you again." Cassandra wept against Harry's chest.

Harry stroked her back as he comforted her. "Cass, I don't mean to be so abrupt, and I'd let you cry but we don't have time right now. I need you take this. It's a mix of calming potion, and just a small amount of emotional suppressant that will last less than eight hours."

Cassandra took the potion from Harry's hand. "Thanks." She knew that she wouldn't be able to control her emotions now that she'd seen him, and with Greyback in the castle, she'd give the game away without it.

Harry kissed her gently before letting go. "Yuck, you don't taste so good now."

Cassandra laughed, as Harry had hoped. "Thanks a lot."

"You're welcome." Harry kept his arm firmly around Cassandra's waist. "I think I need to check out the dinner arrangements. With Los Angeles being 8 hours behind us, it's going to be the optimum time to pull this off."

"I have a list of the pupils who stood up and joined Thomas. Uncle James gave it to Harry." Cassandra pulled out the list for her husband, who wished for a sofa, and pulling his wife onto his lap, sat down to read it. "I won't know these people by sight, so after I've been to dinner tonight, I'll need you to identify them to me."

"Where will you hide?" Cassandra asked.

"In plain sight." Harry pulled a second vial out of his pocket. "Mr. Potter is going to be providing me with one of his hairs, and I'll be taking his place. I'd have just used the mask alone but if Thomas came back for any reason I could end up with a fight on my hands that we aren't ready for."

"Harry, there's something you should know." Cassandra placed a hand on Harry's face. "Greyback is still persisting in his attentions towards me, despite Harry's warnings. However, he still hasn't gone far enough for Harry to kill him. Greyback tries quite often to rile Harry during dinner, so whatever you do, don't lose your temper. We can't afford for you to change, and hurt someone." Even though Harry's unscheduled change had never happened again, both of them were aware that it could happen.

"Harry did warn me." Harry kissed his wife's nose. "And I've already taken the precaution of imbibing a calming potion."

"And you'd better drink that potion now as well." Cassandra got off Harry's lap. "It's almost time for dinner."

Harry Potter plucked out of one of his hairs, and dropped it into the vial. "Good luck, boss."

"We'll see you shortly." Harry swallowed the potion, shuddering with distaste as the thick, gloopy liquid forced itself down his throat.

When the change was complete, Cassandra took Harry's hand. "At least you don't have to change clothes."

"Already planned ahead." Harry was wearing identical clothing to the Potter heir, and sliding Harry's mask onto his face, he set off out of the room.

Once inside the Great Hall, Harry let Cassandra guide him to the head table, and the seat where Harry Potter would normally sit. He hid his displeasure when she filled his plate for him, before filling her own. He also wasn't pleased to see Greyback sitting on the other side of his wife. Taking a bite of the roast beef, Harry scanned the room, taking note of where the teachers now sat, all divided among the tables and amongst the pupils. As Harry listened to the conversation ebb and flow around him, he was able to determine some of the pupils who were loyal to Thomas, making his future job easier.

Harry's observations were disturbed as Greyback addressed Cassandra. "Your master is rather quiet tonight, my pretty. Bite out his tongue, did you?"

Harry swiveled his head. "I've better things to do than to make pointless small talk, especially with a Philistine like you."

Greyback wasn't put off by Harry's insult. "I bet you're saving it to whisper sweet nothings to the pretty one. Or perhaps she prefers you to talk a little dirtier when you're fucking her."

Harry's eyes flashed amber behind his mask as Greyback's barb struck home. "At least I've got someone to fuck."

"For the moment." Greyback's words challenged Harry. "I will get what I want in the end. And the pretty can find out what it's like to have a real man between her legs."

Harry got to his feet, only for Cassandra to take his arm. "Please don't."

"Going to listen to your bitch, Simus?" Greyback baited Harry.

"Cassandra, let go of my arm." Harry demanded.

Aware that she'd normally do as she was told, Cassandra released her grip, and dropped her head subserviently. Greyback laughed, and reached out to touch Cassandra's hair. "Is she this compliant in bed?"

Before Greyback knew what had happened, he found a silver knife at his throat, Harry having left his chair in one fluid movement, and having withdrawn the knife. "You're never going to find out, because before I let you touch her, I'll kill you."

Greyback hissed as Harry slowly slide the silver blade across Greyback's throat, the wooden handle protecting Harry from the pain of contacting silver. "You're welcome to try any time you want, Simus."

Harry removed the knife. "I won't have to try, Greyback." Harry then went to turn away, only to drive the knife into Greyback's right hand, pinning it to the table. "Never touch what is mine. If you ever lay a finger on Cassandra again, it will be more than your hand I'll be doing this to."

Screaming in pain, Greyback yanked the knife out and hurled it across the room. Harry grabbed Cassandra by the arm. "It's time we left, before I change my mind and kill him now." Bending down to pick up his knife as he reached it, Harry marched out of the hall, tugging Cassandra behind him.

Once they reached Harry Potter's rooms and had joined him in the bedroom, Cassandra turned on her husband. "I thought you said you'd taken calming potion."

"I had." Harry confirmed his words. "If I hadn't, he'd have been dead."

"What happened?" Harry Potter asked.

Cassandra told him. "So I think that Greyback's really pissed at you now."

"I don't care." Harry Potter loathed his fellow werewolf. "I'd rather have him out of the way before we do this."

Harry shook his head. "Don't start drawing attention that way. Just avoid Greyback for now."

"Perhaps you should have thought about that before you drove a knife into his hand." Harry Potter remarked.

"No-one touches my wife and gets away with it." Harry made it clear why he'd done it.

"I'm surprised I'm not in the same position." Harry Potter had done far more than Greyback for the sake of appearances.

"Don't think that the wolf in me doesn't want to take your face and smash it to a pulp, because it does." Harry informed him. "But the more logical side knows that you're doing what you have to in order to protect my wife."

"And I always will." Harry Potter promised. "Now let's get down to business."

Four hours later the three of them had hammered out a plan, and just as they'd finished, Harry winced. "Here comes that change."

Cassandra watched as her husband resumed his usual appearance. "Thank goodness for that. It was getting a little weird with two of you."

Harry Potter looked at the time. "I'm going to sleep on the sofa."

Cassandra turned to her husband as she realized why Harry was doing it. "You're staying?"

"Just until dawn." Harry didn't dare stay much later than that. He turned to Harry Potter. "Thanks."

"Glad to be of service." Harry Potter then let himself of the bedroom, closed the door and put up a silencing spell.

Next Chapter: The baptism provides Harry Potter and Cassandra with the break they're looking for.

Chapter 82: The Puppet Master

September 22nd 2012 - San Diego, California

Thomas watched Lucy swimming laps up and down the pool. He'd just completed his own forty laps when she'd walked into the pool area. He was conscious that at this time of the morning, she'd expected him to have finished and be showering, but he'd been unusually disinclined to get out of bed. With Mione very much in the forefront of his mind, having collected his daughters from her the previous night, Thomas compared Lucy to Mione. While both women were petite, Lucy's hair was considerably longer and a dark red, and her body was very toned from the exercises he knew she did.

And unlike Mione, she wasn't nervous around him, and she certainly wasn't afraid to speak her mind. Thomas was aware that he wouldn't have put up with it from anyone else, but Lucy wouldn't have been the person he was attracted to if she hadn't treated him like that. However, Thomas didn't feel the need to protect Lucy as he had done with Mione, and he certainly didn't feel the soul destroying love for her that, deep down, he knew he still felt for his wife.

However, Thomas couldn't deny to himself that he'd been attracted to Lucy ever since she'd faced him at the Ministry, her eyes blazing, and Greyback at her feet. And ever since he'd first kissed her, she'd continued to reject him, although each time he'd gotten further and further. However, as she'd suspected, Lucy's continued resistance had had the effect of making Thomas want her even more, and as Lucy swam by him, Thomas dove into the water and resurfaced at Lucy's side, snaking his arm out to stop her in her tracks.

Lucy didn't get a chance to say anything as Thomas took possession of her mouth, and she was experienced enough to recognize that this kiss was different from the others they'd shared. Nerves getting the better of her, she pushed away from him. "Thomas, stop."

Thomas was getting fed up of her letting him come onto her, and then pushing him away. "Lucy, it's time for the games to end." He brushed her waterlogged hair away from her face. "I want a real relationship

with you. But if you tell me now that you really don't want one, I'll end the games and stop pursuing you."

Lucy had known that Thomas' patience with her reluctance would eventually run out, and she'd said as much to Harry Potter the last time they'd talked. Now it was make or break time for her, and she knew that if she said no, then that chance to get closer to Thomas would be lost forever. "I'm just scared."

Thomas immediately softened at the admission. "Is that why you're always so prickly?"

"Yes." Lucy was more than scared though; she was terrified.

"We'll take it slowly." Thomas molded his hands to her face, and began to kiss her, his tongue seeking hers out when she opened her mouth to him. And when the kiss ended, Thomas stepped back, and reached both of his hands up to the thin straps of the upper half of Lucy's tankini. "Can I?"

Her heart pounding, Lucy nodded, and she closed her eyes as her breasts were exposed to Thomas' gaze. Suddenly her eyes flew open. "What about the girls?"

"They were still asleep when I checked but Jemima is up, and she'll deal with them." Thomas had rented a villa for a week so that he and Lucy could take the girls to the zoo and Sea World in San Diego, after they'd attended Sam's baptism later that day in San Francisco. The new nanny, Jemima, was going to take care of the girls, and he knew that she could be trusted not to let them interrupt him.

"I'm still a little nervous about them coming out." Lucy protested.

"Don't be." Thomas covered her mouth with his again, his hands forcing her tightly against him as he thoroughly explored her mouth. So rather than protesting again, thereby ending any chance of getting really close to Thomas, Lucy instead told herself she could do this, and draped her arms around Thomas' neck.

Lucy's resolve that she could cope was put to the test when Thomas freed her from his kisses, and lifted her up in the buoyant water, taking a nipple into his mouth. Lucy jerked against his hold as tiny pinpricks of unwelcome sensation centered in the breast that Thomas was suckling at, and she felt her nipple hardening in response to his endeavors. Not really wanting to touch him, she had to force herself to place her hands on Thomas' shoulders, and she shuddered with relief when Thomas removed his mouth. She knew, however, that Thomas would think her reaction a very different one.

Thomas lowered Lucy back down into the water, and slipped a thumb into either side of her bottoms. He used the same words he had when he'd wanted to remove her top. "Can I?"

Lucy again nodded, but couldn't say anything, her mouth too dry to speak. She was a little surprised when Thomas disappeared beneath the water to slide her bottoms down, her face burning as she was aware of how exposed she now was.

When Thomas resurfaced, he had the bottoms in his hand, and he released them to let them float away, and made a demand. "Kiss me."

Up until now, Lucy had never instigated a kiss, Thomas always being the one to do so. Her hands shaking, she placed one hand on either side of his face, drawing his head down towards her.

Thomas didn't immediately open his mouth to her, instead he let her continue to brush her lips against his as she gradually increased the pressure of her kiss, until he finally allowed her access to his mouth, and he crushed her against him, taking control back away from her.

Lucy murmured into Thomas' mouth when his hand cupped her breast, his finger and thumb teasing her nipple into hardness. A few moments later, she reflexively sucked her stomach in when his hand left her breast and traveled lower, before settling between her thighs. This was further than she'd ever let Thomas go before, and she couldn't stop herself from trembling when Thomas' hand adopted a gentle rhythm, and began to extract a response from her body.

Lucy's heart began to beat even faster as Thomas took one of her own hands and placed it against the hardness she'd been able to feel against her stomach; Lucy had to fight not to pull her hand away. The touching, kissing and caressing continued until Thomas shed his swimming shorts and pushed Lucy back against the wall of the swimming pool.

Still conscious of the girls' presence in the villa, Lucy pushed back against his chest. "My first time with you is not going to take place in a swimming pool."

"Then let's get out." Thomas took Lucy's hand and unashamedly led her up the steps and out of the pool.

As they entered Thomas' bedroom, and Lucy's eyes fell on the bed, she gulped, and cold dread began to overwhelm her. "I'm not sure I can do this."

Thomas tilted her face up to look at him. "You're still nervous, aren't you?"

"What do you expect?" Lucy's nerves made her lash out.

Thomas picked up his wand and aimed it at the door. "Let's deal with the girls' presence here first." He cast a locking spell. "There, the girls can't get in now. And we can take as long as you need." After casting a contraceptive spell, Thomas then lifted Lucy up and laid her on the bed before lying down beside her, gently stroking her face. "I know you're scared because you don't know it's going to be like, and I can't say I won't hurt you because I'm probably going to."

"It wouldn't be the first time." Lucy countered, once again resorting to sass to get her through the ordeal she knew lay ahead.

"No, but it will be the last." Thomas promised, and he kissed her, his hand caressing her breast, once again manipulating Lucy's body so that it reacted to his touch.

When he shifted his focus to her neck, and bit her gently, Lucy tried to quell her panic, by reminding him of what she was; almost hoping

that it would somehow delay the inevitable. "Shouldn't it be me doing that?"

"Don't you ever shut up?" Thomas trailed his hand down Lucy's stomach until it settled over the soft red hairs that guarded her womanhood.

"You already know the answer to that." Lucy parted her legs as Thomas nudged her thigh with his fingers in a silent petition to allow him access. Lucy bit her lip, almost drawing blood, when she felt Thomas' fingertips disappear into the moist juncture.

Thomas returned to kissing Lucy as he continued with his attentions until a flush began to appear on Lucy's chest and her pupils dilated. Not having heard a single sound come from her so far, he lifted his head to look at her. "For someone who's usually got something to say, you're awfully quiet right now."

Lucy didn't have the luxury of telling Thomas that, as much as she didn't want to, she was taking pleasure from his touch. And it had been a hard fought battle not to make a sound. So instead, she came back with yet another smart mouthed retort. "Not everyone feels the need to moan and groan their way through sex."

"You've never had sex, so you're not exactly qualified to make that statement." Thomas then began to kiss her again. It was some time later, when, after sliding his mouth across to kiss her neck, he whispered softly into her ear. "But you soon will be."

Lucy's stomach lurched as Thomas moved to lie over her, nudging her legs even wider apart as he settled himself between her thighs. She had to fight not to lose her nerve and throw him off her, as he pushed gently into her until he was fully sheathed inside. Not knowing of any other way to cope with what was happening, she made a flip remark. "Well that wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. It certainly didn't hurt, so you obviously don't know everything."

Thomas wished again that Lucy would just shut up. "I feel as if this has suddenly become an exercise in critiquing my expertise."

"You haven't exactly shown me any expertise yet." Lucy threw Thomas' words at him; something she found herself regretting just moments later.

"Then let's do that right now." Thomas began to kiss Lucy, his hand moving to fondle her breast.

Lucy tried desperately to resist her body's reaction to what was happening. But when Thomas nipped at the tip of her tongue, and moved slowly over her, Lucy jolted as her stomach became a knot of tension and she involuntarily moaned. Thomas moved his mouth to whisper in her ear once more. "I told you that you weren't qualified to make a statement about something you've never experienced before."

Lucy tried to fight the next moan that came from her throat as Thomas suckled at a spot beneath her ear that she hadn't even known was sensitive. After that it seemed to Lucy that Thomas managed to discover every single spot on her neck, breasts and face that was receptive to touch, and by the time he finally began to increase the pace, she was clinging to him as if he were a lifeline, her intention to remain silent long gone as she drove her nails into his back. And when Thomas went over the edge, she went with him.

Afterwards, Lucy lay on her back looking up at Thomas, who was lying on his elbow, staring at her. "What are you doing?"

"Wondering why you finally slept with me." Thomas ran his fingers down her arm. "Why now?"

Lucy went onto the defensive. "If you're waiting to hear flowery words of love spilling from my lips, then you're going to be disappointed."

"I don't expect to hear anything of the sort." Thomas entwined his fingers with Lucy's. "But I'd like an answer to my question. I put you through hell at the Ministry; you made it clear that you didn't really like me when I rescued you from New Azkaban, and you've fought me every step of the way ever since then. Why give in now?"

"I slept with you now because you're like water, Thomas; persistent." Lucy could see she'd thrown him with her comment. "You just keep on wearing a person down."

"That's not exactly a compliment." Thomas, however, wasn't exactly offended by her comment understanding that hitting out was Lucy's way of protecting herself. "But you could have said no."

"I could have but this was the right time, and the right place." Lucy reminded Thomas of her words to him when she'd told him why, up until that time, she'd never made love before.

"And the right person?" Thomas questioned her third qualification.

"No, Mickey Mouse was, but unfortunately he was unavailable." Lucy snapped.

Thomas laughed. "So you do like me."

"Don't get too big for your breeches." Lucy warned. "Just because I slept with you doesn't mean I like you."

"Liar." Thomas thought Lucy was playing.

"Don't say I didn't warn you." Lucy then turned the spotlight onto Thomas. "I've never asked you before about why you rescued me. I almost killed you in the Ministry, yet you still came after me. And even though I'm aware that you found me attractive, you weren't exactly in love with me; something I might have understood you risking your life for. So why did you do it?"

"I almost didn't rescue you." Thomas revealed, having no idea that this decision was the one that had initiated the start of his downfall. "But I suffered a rare pang of guilt that you'd obviously come over all noble and told Black what you'd done, when you could have just blamed me."

"I was an Auror, and it was my duty to make a full disclosure about what had happened." Lucy reminded him of her former life. "I didn't

expect a pat on the back for killing Dumbledore, but I certainly didn't expect a death sentence."

"Which is why I rescued you." Thomas brushed his thumb over the back of Lucy's hand. "And I've wanted you ever since you stood up to me."

Lucy was already very aware of that. "So no words of undying love for me then?"

"Not right now, but I could fall for you." Thomas told Lucy what he'd already told his wife. "And I can state unequivocally that there hasn't been a dull moment since I met you."

"Is that why you slept with me?" Lucy fished. "Because I entertain you?"

"Not exactly; I slept with you because I haven't wanted anyone like that for a long time." Thomas then went further. "And you should know that I want more than just a casual relationship with you."

Lucy suspected she knew what he was going to say, but she asked him to clarify it anyway. "Exactly what do you mean?"

Thomas told her. "I want you to move in with me."

"Move in with you?" Lucy was wrong about her suspicions. She'd expected him to say that he expected her to commit to a monogamous relationship, but nothing as serious as her moving in with him. "Why?"

"I don't like sleeping alone." Thomas admitted.

"So you're looking for a replacement for your wife?" Lucy pulled her hand free as she tried to act indignantly.

"No." Thomas could see why she'd think that. "You're nothing like Mione, and you're the last person I'd ever try to replace her with. The two of you are poles apart."

"Is that why you chose me?" Lucy sat up, taking care to keep the sheet wrapped around her breasts.

"I chose you because you stand up to me, you're not afraid of me, and I wanted you." Thomas listed his reasons. "And my daughter likes you."

"Hasn't she liked any of the women you've been with since you split up with Mione?" Lucy had never heard Maddie mention any, and she had no idea who Thomas had been sleeping with before he started to make his interest known in her.

She soon found out. "As I said, you're the first woman I wanted for a long time, and there hasn't been anyone else since I split up with Mione, not until you."

Lucy gave him a dry smile. "I find it quite ironic that you hate Lupin for what he is, yet you've chosen a woman who suffers from the same disease he does."

"I don't hate Lupin for being a werewolf. I hate him because he stole my wife." Thomas clarified his dislike for Remus. "If I hated werewolves, Harry wouldn't be in the position he is today."

"I'd rather you didn't mention his name. Just as you hate Lupin, I hate Potter." Wanting to distance herself from Harry, Lucy blatantly lied about her feelings for the Potter heir.

"It should really be me you hate." Thomas reminded her. "I'm the one who told him to bite you."

Lucy could hardly tell Thomas that she did blame him. "But he's the one who did it."

"I wish you'd just accepted my offer then." Thomas had been genuine when he'd given it.

"I couldn't." Lucy drew her knees up to her chin. "I don't even like the fact that I had to say yes when I did."

"And yet you still managed to find your way into my bed." Thomas returned the discussion back to where it had started. "Not that I'm complaining."

"You shouldn't be." Lucy met his gaze. "I've sacrificed something I've considered precious for a very long time." Lucy let Thomas believe she was talking about her virginity, and not her integrity.

Thomas believed exactly what Lucy thought he would. "But you're never going to give me your heart, are you?"

Lucy shook her head, and fed him a half-truth. "I'm attracted to you; I like spending time with you, but I'm not, nor will I ever be, in love with you."

"Forever is a long time, Lucy." Thomas reminded her of what he was seeking.

"You're right." Lucy acknowledged his comment. "Then again so is a week, a month, a year. And what happens if, say in a year, or two years, or five years, I decide that I don't want this. What happens if you do fall in love with me, and one day I reject you; will you kill me?"

"I can't say I'd be happy about it. But if you're honest with me, then no, I wouldn't hurt you." Thomas threw back the sheet and got up. "But if you fuck with me, then you would live to regret it. Well, for a short time you would."

"So much for sugarcoating your words." Lucy tugged the sheet back around herself.

"Why bother?" Thomas selected clothes as he answered her. "I'd rather be upfront about what I expect from you, and what the consequences will be if you fail to meet those expectations. So if you ever want to end our relationship, then you tell me that, and don't cheat on me first. I have no intention of ever cheating on you, and therefore expect the same fidelity in return."

"And vice versa." Lucy didn't let Thomas' threat bother her, as she already knew the score. "Cheat on me, and I'll take you apart with my bare hands, even if it means my own death."

"Considering you don't love me, that's a little drastic isn't it?" Thomas picked up his wand.

"Not really." Lucy continued to snipe at him as she had done from the beginning. "Since you've just told me what you'd do to me if I cheated on you, I don't see why a case of 'what's good for the goose' shouldn't apply here."

"So now we've both made it clear what we expect, does this mean that you'll move in with me?" Thomas paused at the entrance to the bathroom.

"I don't know." Lucy's movements would become curtailed the moment she did. But if she said yes, it would also mean that she'd finally be in the position that her defection had been intended to accomplish.

Thomas misread her reluctance. "I'm not asking you to be a replacement for Mione. You currently spend most of your time with me already. Now that we've slept together, we'll probably spend even more time together, and it seems silly not to take that final step."

"When you put it that way, it does seem silly." Lucy wrapped the sheet around her. "I'm going back to my room to shower."

"I have to nip into the office this morning." Thomas called back as he spelled his shower on. "But I'll be back at ten to change before we have to leave for the baptism."

"I'll be ready." Lucy headed off to her bedroom, and spelled on her own shower. Only once she was standing inside, did she sink to the ground and start to cry as she remembered how she'd gotten into this mess in the first place.

11th November 2011

St. Mungo's Hospital

After viewing Lucy's memories of Thomas' attack on the Ministry and BritAD, Sirius now had his confirmation as to what exactly had happened. "First things first, Lucy. I need an oath from you that what we've discussed so far will stay between us, as will the remainder of this conversation. I'm afraid I can't have Seville's true identity being revealed by anyone; it would cause too much chaos and disruption, and affect far too many lives other than his own."

Lucy took Sirius' wand from him, Thomas having relieved her of hers, and swore the oath, gasping with pain as it took hold, the usual immunity a werewolf had not yet in effect. "I hate swearing oaths."

Sirius pulled out a pain potion he'd picked up for his headache and handed it over. "Take this." As Lucy did as he instructed, Sirius went on. "After reviewing your memories, you'll be pleased to hear that I won't be bringing you up on charges for killing the Minister."

Lucy hadn't expected to find herself on trial, but she still hadn't been totally sure that there wouldn't have been some price to pay. "But I still murdered someone in cold blood."

"Don't look at it that way." Sirius made a note on his pad. "Look at it like this. Dumbledore would have found himself standing trial as an accessory to the murders of every one of the Aurors who died on Azkaban Island. By killing him, you've just eliminated the middleman, because I would, without doubt, have requested the death penalty for him."

"There isn't one, Sir." Lucy pointed out.

"There is as from tomorrow. Dumbledore himself pushed the bill through the Wizengamot at my request. And an announcement will be made in the Prophet in the morning." Sirius didn't normally believe in vengeance but after learning about Orion, he was now glad that he had argued for it. "And by dealing with Dumbledore, what you did yesterday was to uphold the honor of BritAD by, as Seville quite rightly pointed out, saving lives."

"It still didn't give me the right to take a life to do that." Lucy argued, her guilt at what she'd done very much alive.

Sirius held out his hand. "Do you have your badge?"

"Yes, Sir." Lucy even had it in her bed. "Here."

Sirius tapped it. "I've made you a third class Unspeakable. It gives you the right to do whatever is necessary, and means that you are above the law."

"No-one should be above the law." Lucy had to admit she was relieved that she wasn't going to be prosecuted, but she wasn't happy about Sirius' comment.

"No, they shouldn't." Sirius agreed. "But we're at war, Lucy, and some people have to make far greater sacrifices than anyone should be called on to do, and sometimes that requires them to be above the law."

"Like me?" Lucy had no idea that Sirius was talking about Harry Potter.

"Yes, and me." Sirius rubbed his eyes as he thought about what he'd lost. "And I know you must be feeling guilty, but don't. If I'd been there, I would have done the same as you, but given how Seville feels about me, I wouldn't have had the same chance."

"He hates Auror Sebastian more though than you, doesn't he?" Lucy hadn't missed the vitriol in Thomas' voice when he'd spoken about Harry.

"Yes." Sirius, however, believed that Thomas also respected Harry. "Now, is there anything else you want to tell me?"

Lucy twisted the ring that was currently on her finger. "No, Sir. My concern, however, is that I've been compromised."

"We can deal with that when Harry returns in the morning." Sirius informed her, as an idea came to him. A possibility of bringing

Thomas down; a way of getting revenge for his son's death. "But there is an alternative. Lucy, Seville obviously likes you, and I want you to consider joining him."

"No, Sir." Lucy immediately refused. "It would be too suspicious. Given that I've just said no when he threatened my life and had one of his dogs turn me, he wouldn't buy it."

"I'm willing to bet he would if he thought you were paying for what you did. For all of his faults, Seville has a strange sense of honor." Sirius found Thomas' morals bizarre to say the least. "Lucy, if there was a chance we could get you into the organization, how far are you willing to go to bring him down?"

"I don't know, Sir." Lucy wanted Sirius to clarify what he wanted from her. "What exactly do you mean by how far?"

Sirius spelled it out for her. "After viewing your memories, I believe that Seville not only likes you but that he's attracted to you. And his wife is no longer in the picture."

Lucy felt a shiver go down her spine. "You can't be serious, Sir."

"Deadly." Sirius took Lucy's hand. "Lucy, without someone close to Thomas, we're almost completely blind, especially now that Mione has burned her bridges with him."

"She's definitely not his favorite person." Lucy responded. "And given what Cassandra said, I know I wouldn't have cheated on him."

"Quite." Sirius deliberately didn't tell Lucy about what Thomas had done to Mione. "So you'd know better than to do that. And if you said yes, you wouldn't be entirely on your own. I have an operative on the inside working for us."

"Can I ask who, Sir?" Lucy wondered if it was someone in the Inner Circle or just an ordinary Death Eater.

"It's better you don't know." Sirius wasn't going to take the chance that Lucy might somehow give his godson away, particularly as it

obvious that she was resentful about what Harry had done to her. "When you've managed to insinuate yourself with Seville, I'll arrange for my contact to get in touch with you. And like you, he's an Unspeakable."

"Is that so he's above the law?" Lucy questioned Sirius' reasons.

"It is. Unfortunately he's had to do some terrible things to maintain his cover; including taking the lives of innocents." Sirius could see how shocked Lucy was. "However, I've given him carte blanche to do whatever is necessary, and I'm giving you the same."

"I only killed Dumbledore to save lives, and he was far from blameless." Lucy pointed out. "I'm not sure I could do it to someone who was innocent."

Sirius could see that she wasn't convinced, and he pushed harder. "I understand that, but I need you to look at the bigger picture, Lucy. Even though my operative can pass on important information, we still need someone closer. I thought that we'd lost that opportunity, but after seeing your memory of the night's events, it turns out that there might be a chance for us after all. We need you."

Lucy didn't answer straightaway, as she considered what Sirius was asking of her. "Seville's far from stupid, Sir, and he is dangerous. He might see through this."

"He might, but I'm pinning my hopes on the possibility that he won't." Thinking about his son, Sirius made an impassioned plea. "Lucy, I won't lie and say that this will work. If you agree to help, there's every chance that he won't take the bait. Even if he does, then he still might kill you. But I'm also not going to lie about why we need you. You might be able to make a difference in the outcome of this war, Lucy. So are you going to help?"

Lucy hoped she wouldn't live to regret this. "What do you need me to do, Sir?"

Afterwards, sitting alone in her cell Lucy had had time to reflect on what she was doing really meant, and what Thomas would do to her

if he ever discovered that she was playing him. Panic had set in, and Lucy had decided that she couldn't do it. Sending word that she wanted to speak to Sirius, she waited and waited to hear from him. Fear had almost overwhelmed her when Sirius hadn't shown up.

On the morning her execution was scheduled, she'd become even more panicked, believing that Sirius had never had any real intention of setting her free; that he was going to have her executed as a way of cleaning up the mess of Dumbledore's death. At her darkest moment the door to her cell had opened, and she'd almost been filled with relief to see Thomas. A relief she no longer felt.

Seville Corporation, Miami

Thomas closed his office door and turned around to find an unwelcome face waiting for him. "I thought I made it perfectly clear the last time we met that I didn't ever want to see you again."

Atropos dangled her legs over Thomas' desk. "I don't do so well with hints."

"So, what do you want?" Thomas made his way to his chair.

"To see how you are." Atropos swiveled and slid across the desk so that she was facing Thomas as he sat down. "It's been a while."

"I find it strange that you appear less than an hour after I slept with Lucy." Thomas started to sort through his post, not looking at Atropos while he did so.

"I did intend to visit after you'd found out the truth about your wife, but I'm glad I saved what little time I had left for now." Atropos smirked. "And I did warn you about Mione."

"You said she'd leave because of who I was, and not because of what I'd do." Thomas reminded the Fate.

"I was wrong." Atropos easily admitted. "She loved you more than I thought she did. But this new one doesn't, does she? So why her?"

She's not exactly the prettiest girl out there, and she really has no idea when to shut up."

Thomas glanced up. "You think I should have chosen someone like you instead?"

"Why not?" Atropos placed a bare foot on Thomas' thigh. "I'm attractive, most definitely not a virgin, and I made it clear that I wanted you. You've had to fight for her every step of the way."

"I like the challenge." Thomas ignored the foot that was making its way up his thigh. "Something you most definitely are not."

"So if I'd played the same games little miss prim and proper did, I'd have stood a chance with you?" By now Atropos' foot had reached her intended target.

"Not a cat in hell's chance." Thomas left her foot where it was. "And you can keep doing that for as long as you want. I don't desire you; you leave me cold, Atropos. Something Lucy most definitely does not."

Atropos withdrew her foot. "But she's a mere mortal, and a half-breed."

"It's my fault that Lucy is a werewolf, and I don't give a shit about her mortality." Thomas dropped several sheets of paper into his in-tray; the rest he put into the pile to shred. "And it's not as if I won't be able to change that." Thomas checked his diary, before glancing up at Atropos again. "Did you imagine that because I'd parted from Mione that I'd want you because you're immortal? Well, let me spell it out for you. You are poison, Atropos. And I know that I'm far from lily-white but at least I would never sell my family out for a leg-up, which is exactly what you'd done. You're scum, sweetheart." Thomas got to his feet. "I'll keep my end of the bargain, but I'd rather cut my own hands off than touch you."

Her face flushed with anger, Atropos scowled. "Enjoy your milksop."

"Lucy is hardly a milksop; she has more integrity, vivacity and courage in her little finger than you have in your entire body." Thomas took out his wand. "Goodbye."

Atropos swore as she too vanished, returning to the gardens. She found her mother waiting for her. "Mother, this is a surprise."

Nyx shook her head. "Atropos, you never fail to disappoint me, do you? I gave you a chance once before to redeem yourself, and you promised me faithfully that you would. But you've failed me yet again."

Atropos faltered. "What do you mean?"

"Fraternalizing with the enemy is a serious thing, Atropos." Nyx advanced on her daughter. "One you will be paying the price for."

"I did it for us." Atropos' voice shook as Nyx reached out for her.

"You did it for yourself." Nyx touched her daughter's arm. "You're selfish to the core; you have no humility; no sense of responsibility. I admit I blame myself for some of that, but none of your siblings have turned out like you."

"What are you going to do to me?" Atropos had every reason to be scared of her mother's wrath, as this wouldn't be the first time that Nyx had punished her.

"You'll find out when this mess is over." Nyx promised. "When Thomas receives his judgment, you too will receive yours."

"But what if he wins?" Atropos pointed out.

"He won't." Nyx smiled. "You see this has all come about because of me. I set up the players, and the scenes. Thomas has no more chance of beating me than you have of avoiding your punishment."

"What exactly did you do?" Atropos questioned her mother, not wanting to dwell on what Nyx might do to her.

"I interfered with H.J.'s trip into the past." Nyx revealed her tinkering. "His soul should have merged with Harry's but I made sure it didn't. I controlled the direction that Harry's life would take after that, right up until he stepped into the Propylaeum to come here. After that I decided to see how things would play out on their own."

"You let us believe that we were going to be defeated by Thomas." Atropos was aghast. "Why?"

"I had to know whether I could believe in you again. Changes are coming, and only those who deserve it will move onto the next plane of existence." Nyx didn't say how she knew this. "And so this was a test; a test you've failed by the way."

"And my precious sisters?" Atropos snarled.

"They will move on with me." Nyx informed her daughter. "But that is enough for now. The play for the moment is still very much alive, and the players are moving towards the last act."

Atropos vanished, banished by her mother to a netherworld to wait for the play to end, and the puppet master took her position by the font to watch the action unfold.

Present Time - San Francisco

Luna could feel Xander glowering at Thomas. He'd only agreed to attend the baptism because he was worried about Luna's safety, and she'd refused to back down and not go. She hissed at him. "I hate him too but just stop it."

"Why don't you just kill him?" Xander hissed back at his wife. "He's got his back to you."

"You go up and stab him then." Luna suggested, aware that her husband had a knife in his boot.

His bluff called, Xander immediately backed off. "Okay, I'll shut up."

Luna left Xander at the seat he was intending to sit in, and made her way to the front of the church, where she was shown to a seat next to Thomas, and she sat stiffly next to him.

Aware of Luna's discomfort, Thomas couldn't resist baiting her. "Mrs. Harris, I didn't expect that the next time we met would be under such pleasant circumstances."

"Neither did I." Comfortable in the knowledge that Thomas wouldn't attack her, Luna made her feelings for Thomas quite clear. "I was actually hoping that the next time we met would be at your execution or funeral, but alas, I've been disappointed."

"There's not much one can say to that, is there?" Thomas respectfully fell silent as Cammie and Regulus joined them, and the service began.

Afterwards, the group had barely just finished with taking the obligatory photographs outside the church, when a car drew up. A tall man in a suit got out, and hurried up the steps to join Thomas, and whispered something in his ear. Thomas' face became like stone. "Thank you. I'll be right there." He turned to Regulus. "I'm afraid I have to go."

Lucy waited until Thomas had finished saying goodbye before pulling him to one side. "What's wrong?"

"Someone decided to take advantage of my absence to try and free everyone from Hogwarts." Thomas quickly explained. "I have to get back."

"I'll come with you." Lucy was afraid for everyone involved, and wondered what could have gone wrong if Thomas had found out what was happening.

Thomas took out his credit card. "I don't want you there. Stay here, and pay for the meal with this. I'll be back when I can."

Aware that every second that Thomas was delayed bought those mounting the rescue more time, Lucy grabbed Thomas' wrist as he went to leave, and then pulled his head down to hers, kissing him.

Thomas was a little surprised by the passion in the kiss, and when he lifted his head, he questioned Lucy's actions. "What was that for?"

"It's my way of saying be careful." Lucy softened her voice. "I might argue and bicker with you, but I don't want to see you dead."

"A few months ago, I'd have thought differently." Thomas kept his voice low, so that it wouldn't carry to the others.

"A few months ago I hadn't slept with you, and agreed to move in." Lucy reminded him of that morning. "And while I might not love you, I do care."

Thomas yanked Lucy back into his arms, and kissed her fiercely before letting her go. "Nothing's going to happen to me. I'll be back later." Thomas then walked down the stairs, and climbed into the car where, behind the darkened glass, he disappeared before the car had even left the kerb.

After Thomas had left, Lucy followed the others to the restaurant that was close by the church. Once inside, Lucy excused herself and made her way to the restroom. She turned when she found that Luna had followed her. "Hello."

Luna had had one of her feelings about Lucy, and she'd decided to follow up on it. "Why did you kill Dumbledore and join Seville? You were supposed to be on our side."

Going on what Harry Potter had told her, Lucy pulled Luna into a cubicle with her and set up a silencing spell. "I am on your side."

"It doesn't look like it to me." Even with her feelings, Luna still challenged the girl who was currently blocking her from leaving. "I doubt I'd have gotten a piece of paper between the two of you outside of that church."

"Do you know what's happening today?" Lucy questioned Luna.

Luna did but denied it. "No."

Lucy knew that Luna was lying, and she demonstrated that she too knew what was happening. "You know as well as I do that Commander Sebastian is freeing everyone from Hogwarts. And you must also know that something has gone wrong because Thomas has found out. I was just trying to make sure that he was held up for as long as possible."

Luna couldn't argue with Lucy's logic, and her instincts told her that she was right to trust the girl. "How did you know about Hogwarts?"

"I'm the one who passed on the information so that it could happen." Lucy didn't reveal who to.

"So you've a contact in Thomas' ranks?" Luna was aware that Harry Potter was working as a double-agent, Harry Sebastian eschewing the secrecy that Sirius had insisted upon when Harry had told him that he could.

Up until Luna had accosted her, however, Lucy had been adamant about not revealing her part in what was going on. "You know very well who it is."

"You're right, I do." Luna responded. "Now the question is are you willing to trust me enough to give me his name, so that I'll know for sure we're both on the same side."

"Harry Potter told me that you'd act like this if I ever came across you." Lucy revealed who her contact was. She didn't say that Harry had given her a rundown on everyone who was involved in the rebellion against Thomas. "And he also said that if we should ever meet, that I could trust you. But why didn't you or Hermione Sebastian tell Commander Sebastian about this date?"

Luna stopped fingering her wand, and relaxed. "Because we've both sworn to Cammie that we'd tell no-one where she was, so we couldn't

pass on the information." Luna frowned. "Did Harry Potter tell anyone that she's here?"

"Of course he didn't." Lucy denied he had. "He just passed on the information that Thomas was attending a baptism in Los Angeles."

"We're not in Los Angeles." Luna observed.

"I know that." Lucy rolled her eyes as she waited for Luna to grasp what she'd done, and why.

"And you trust Harry Potter not to pass on the information that this baptism is for Cammie's son?" Luna knew that Harry wouldn't necessarily hurt Cammie but his feelings for her husband were a very different matter. "He's not exactly enamored of Regulus."

"Because like you, I've sworn an oath to keep Cammie's presence in this city a secret, and so I didn't tell Harry whose baptism it was or the correct city. But even if I had, Harry was the one who let Cammie leave to join Reg." Lucy revealed. "He wouldn't betray Cammie. He believes he let her down once; I can't see him doing it again. He loved her too much."

"He told you that?" Luna wondered how close the two had gotten.

"We've become friends. And as friends, we talk, even though he has Cassandra." Lucy smiled when she thought about some of their chats. "Harry said that her concern gets rather stifling at times, so instead he confides in me; about Cassandra herself, about Cammie, and about, well, other things. And in return I get a friendly ear. Harry's the only one I have for that."

"So your situation is a little like Cammie's own. She only turned to Regulus because she felt she had no-one else." Luna had gotten to know the former Death Eater well over the last month; her initial reluctance to befriend him had been worn down when he'd revealed one act that he'd performed for Cammie; one act that had proved beyond a shadow of a doubt to Luna that Regulus truly loved Cammie. It had also been the reason for Xander's change of heart,

and his agreeing somewhat reluctantly to meet the former Death Eater.

"A little alike." Lucy acknowledged the similarities in hers and Cammie's situations. "Except that I supposedly also have Thomas to turn to."

"So are you sleeping with him?" Luna asked bluntly.

Lucy shuddered. "Yes."

Luna placed a sympathetic hand on Lucy's arm. "Is it awful?"

"Yes." Lucy's face crumpled. "And I hate myself."

Having wormed it out of Mione exactly how accomplished Thomas was in bed, Luna guessed at how Lucy had reacted to him, and she wrapped the girl in her arms. "Just look at it as doing a job."

"That's how Harry said I should deal with it." Lucy gently disentangled herself, not daring to give into the tears that threatened in case she couldn't stop them, and she wiped away the few that had escaped. As she mentioned Harry, she thought about what could be happening at that moment. "I just hope he and the others are okay."

Luna took out her wand and repaired Lucy's hair where she'd mussed it up comforting her. "There that's better. Now don't worry, they will all be just fine."

Following Luna back to the table, Lucy had no idea how wrong Luna's words were going to be.

Next Chapter: Someone has to make a sacrifice: Lucy sets out a plan to Harry Sebastian: Cammie finally lays Regulus' fears about her leaving him for someone magical to rest.

Chapter 83: And Then There Were Two

September 29th 2012

Hogwarts

Having expecting Harry Sebastian to be close to the gates in order for him to escape, Thomas had initially appeared there. However, on spotting Harry in the distance, Thomas locked the gates, and he began to stride forward in pursuit of Harry. Harry spotted him just moments after he did so. "Oh fuck."

Cassandra went white when she realized who'd arrived. "Harry, we have to go."

"No." Harry refused. "We both knew I was going to have to face him eventually."

"But you're injured." Cassandra protested. "He'll slaughter you."

Harry turned to the man at his side. "Get my wife out."

Rather than obeying Harry's order, instead the man next to him punched Harry, and under the force of such an untempered blow, Harry was instantly dazed. A stupefy spell then him hit and, the man who'd cast it, slung Harry over his shoulder, and yelled out. "Everyone, retreat." The few Aurors left, who'd been trying to give those inside as much time as possible to get out, turned and ran into Hogwarts.

Harry Potter whirled around as the group came running into the Great Hall, Harry Sebastian slung unconscious over Destin Simon's shoulder. "What happened to him?"

"Thomas is here." Destin hurriedly told him. "Harry was going to take him on but he's too badly hurt to be effective right now, so I had to persuade him otherwise."

As Destin was explaining what had happened to her husband, Cassandra turned to the doors. "Obfirmo Recedo Cassandra Eleanor Sebastian." Nothing happened. "Dammit, the magic won't let me."

"It's Thomas that won't let you, not the magic, and that's a restricted spell after Harry used it at Castrum." Harry Potter yelled out as he aimed his own wand at the doors. "Obfirmo Maximus."

As the doors slammed shut and locked themselves, Harry then used his wand to send the large and very heavy tables towards the doors to form a blockade. He knew, however, that it wouldn't last long, as Thomas and the Inner Circle all had apparition rights inside Hogwarts. They had no way of knowing that Thomas was casually strolling through the grounds, having ordered his men to go ahead of him and hunt them down, believing that Harry Sebastian and his group had no way out.

Cassandra frowned when she ran into the antechamber to discover that there were still seven students and five slayers to leave, as well as Severus and the Aurors who'd been the last to retreat. "Severus, what's taking so long?"

"We missed a student on Seville's side." Severus opened the cabinet to show her. "He damaged the lock when he tried to destroy the cabinet. Harry stopped him from damaging it completely but someone has to close it from this side. We tried to use magic to keep it closed but it failed."

The last seven students climbed into the cabinet and disappeared as the sound of wood exploding reached their ears, Thomas' men having realized where the fugitives had fled to. Harry hurried the slayers and several of the Aurors in when the cabinet was free, and then finally the remaining Aurors climbed in and vanished. "Father, you have to go."

"You go." Severus offered. "I'm staying."

"I can't let you do that." As he spoke, Harry punched Severus as Destin had just done with Harry Sebastian; however, in contrast, he tempered the force of his blow. Catching Severus, he dropped him

into the cabinet, alongside Harry. "Destin, it's time for you to go as well."

"I will stay." Destin offered.

"No." Harry refused. "You have a wife and children, I do not. Now go, and when you get to the other side, I suggest you enervate Harry and get him to deactivate that Dark Mark. Thomas has seen you now, and he'll kill you if you don't." Destin had torn off his mask to take part in the fighting, not wanting to be identified as one of the enemy in the ensuing chaos, and he'd said that he wanted to die with the air on his face if that was what was meant to happen to him.

"I will do so." Destin then shook hands with Harry. "It has been a pleasure, my friend."

"Likewise." Harry then turned to Cassandra, who was hanging back. "Cassandra, get into the cabinet."

Cassandra glanced at her husband where he lay unconscious next to Severus, and then back at Harry Potter. "No. I'll close the door to the cabinet."

"You're going with your husband." Harry ordered as yet another loud splitting noise reached their ears. "He needs you."

"But it could be either one of you who's destined to take Thomas down." Cassandra protested. "I'm expendable."

"No, you're not. Cassandra, I can't take Thomas on while I have a Dark Mark and have sworn allegiance to him." Harry tried to ignore the sounds of forced entry that were getting louder. "I'm never going to be the one. So get into the cabinet."

"He'll torture you if you stay, Harry." Cassandra knew only too well what awaited Harry Potter.

"And if you stay, you'd be handed around like candy before he killed you." Harry Potter smiled regretfully. "I gave Harry my word that I'd protect you. You have to go."

"Destin, tell him." Cassandra argued. "We need him alive."

"Harry is right, Cassandra." Destin held out his hand. "Come on."

"But he'll kill Harry." Cassandra started to cry.

"I don't even know why we're having this discussion." Harry cupped her cheek, before taking her hand.

"Please go." Cassandra pleaded, as Harry gently stroked her cheek.

"You're forgetting I can apparate out." Harry lied, aware that Thomas would have placed the school under a no apparition zone the moment he'd realized something was up, and that whoever stayed behind had already signed their own death warrant. "So before he gets in, go."

Aware that she wasn't going to change Harry's mind, and that she was endangering the few of them left to leave, Cassandra threw her arms around Harry's neck. "I'll miss you. You've been the best of friends to me." Then she kissed him.

Harry responded to the kiss for a few moments, before pulling back and placing a kiss on her forehead. "Take care of my sister for me, and tell Lucy I'm sorry." Harry then swung Cassandra around and placed her in the cabinet, before he shut the door, feeling more than a little despondent. After checking that the cabinet was truly empty, Harry then aimed his wand at it, and finished off what Blenkinsopp had attempted a short while earlier.

Thomas stepped into the room just as the last few splinters of wood landed on the ground. "Potter."

"Avada..." Harry aimed his wand at Thomas, only for Thomas, Rupert, and Cedric to all disarm him at the same time. Harry didn't stand a chance, the force of three disarming spells throwing him into the air and onto his back. And the last thing he saw before he passed out was Thomas standing over him, and aiming his wand at him. "Stupefy."

San Diego

"Wake up, Lucy." Thomas gently shook her.

Lucy opened her eyes. "What time is it?"

"6am." Thomas said softly, his voice silky. "I only came back to tell you how things had gone."

"So what happened?" Lucy struggled to come out of sleep, having only finally managed to drop off just after 3am.

"Someone betrayed me." Thomas sat down on the edge of the bed. "Someone close to me."

All at once, Lucy was wide awake. "Who?"

"Your least favorite person." Thomas waited to see who Lucy guessed at.

"Greyback?" Lucy couldn't say Harry's name.

"Close. It was Potter." Thomas remarked, knowing that Greyback too hadn't been at the top of Lucy's personal favorites list.

"Potter?" Lucy's heart began to race. "How do you know?"

"Because I caught him red-handed." Thomas tugged Lucy close to him. "Why is it that everyone close to me ends up betraying me? Well, almost everyone." Thomas couldn't include Regulus or Amicus in his estimation. Suddenly unsure of the woman in his arms, Thomas slid his fingers into Lucy's hair and tilted her head back. "You'd never betray me, would you, Little Spitfire?"

"Hardly." Lucy met his eyes, her tone cold. "If I'd want to die, I'd have just stayed in my prison cell. I'm sure that my death would have been a lot less painful that way."

Thomas eased his grip on Lucy's hair. "You're angry with me, aren't you?"

"What do you expect?" Lucy tugged free of his grasp, and threw back the covers. "You may as well have just accused me of being in league with Potter." She climbed out of the bed. "Well guess what. You can shove my moving in with you. I'm going to sleep back in my own room."

Thomas grabbed her wrist to stop her leaving his room. "Lucy, I'm sorry."

"Just fuck off." Lucy pulled free.

Thomas had never seen Lucy so angry before. "I mean it. I'm sorry."

"Really?" Lucy kept her manner brittle. "You didn't seem very sorry when you were just manhandling me."

Thomas cupped her face. "I'm just angry."

"Next time aim it at the right party." Lucy pulled free of Thomas' hands. "Unless you want another situation like Mione's on your hands."

Thomas believed he'd really riled Lucy and that he'd genuinely hurt her feelings, so unusually for him, he apologized again. "Lucy, I'm truly sorry. I shouldn't have questioned your honesty. Now will you please get back into bed?"

"I suppose so." Lucy returned to lie down, still bristling. "Seeing as you rarely apologize."

"I'm well aware of that, but as you've just pointed out, my temper cost me my marriage, and I don't want my distrust and anger to cost me our relationship." Thomas pulled the covers back over Lucy. "I'll be back when it's over."

Lucy fought back the tears that wanted to spring forth at his words. "What are you going to do to him?"

"Mr. Potter is going to have one final lesson in potions." Thomas straightened up, and pulled out a vial.

"Oh Merlin." Lucy's hand flew to her mouth.

Thomas thankfully misread her horrified reaction. "Lucy, calm down. It's never going to happen to you."

"You don't know that." Lucy went with Thomas' assumption, and the tears she'd been holding back for Harry burst forth.

Thomas immediately sat back down on the bed and hauled Lucy into his arms. "I promise I'll never let anything happen to you; especially not that."

Lucy wasn't so sure if Thomas ever found the truth about her, and she lifted her head to look at him. "Please, Thomas. I can't bear the thought of that stuff being used on anyone; not even Potter. Do it some other way."

"If Potter tells me what I want to know, then I'll kill him quickly." Thomas released Lucy. "But that's all I'm promising."

"What do you mean, know?" Lucy questioned Thomas.

"I believe he's one of Sebastian's own, so he has to be aware of the new location of the Ministry and BritAD. I know they were on Azkaban Island but they've moved, and I want those locations." Thomas straightened up. "Watch the children for me."

"Can't you put it off? The kids won't enjoy their trip to zoo without you." Lucy hoped she could delay Thomas, and that somehow, it might buy Harry enough time to do something.

"They'll enjoy themselves just as much with you." Thomas had no intention of letting his children miss out. "And they don't know I'm going, so they won't miss me."

"I'm going to take them out to an early breakfast first then." Lucy threw back the covers again, not able to lie there. "So I need to get showered."

"I'll try and join you for lunch. Go to The Prado at one." Thomas kissed Lucy's cheek, and vanished.

Lucy headed into the bathroom, switched on the shower and got in, letting the water wash away her tears. After twenty minutes she climbed out, took a calming potion from her purse, and removed any traces of crying. Then she dressed and got Maddie and Bella ready to go.

As the three of them sat in the restaurant, Maddie frowned. "Luce, why aren't you eating?"

"I'm not very hungry." Lucy would have gagged if she'd tried to eat anything. "But I'm having my orange juice."

"Dad said that breakfast is the most important meal of the day." Maddie reminded Lucy.

"I know what your Dad said." Lucy kept any bitterness out of her voice. "Maddie, I want you to watch Bella for me. I need to use the restroom."

Maddie swelled up with pride that Lucy trusted her enough. "We'll be okay."

"I know you will." Lucy still stopped a passing waitress. "Can you watch the children for me while I make a call and use the restroom? Just don't tell the eldest; she thinks I've left her in charge."

The waitress smiled conspiratorially. "Of course I can, Ma'am."

"Thank you." Lucy then hurried to the back of the restaurant to make a call; Luna having given her the number in case of an emergency. "I'd like to make a reverse charge call to England. The number is 121 456 9898. If you could tell them that it's Lucy Viking."

Remus had already been told about Lucy by Cassandra, and his voice was friendly, unlike the last time the two of them had talked. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine." Lucy glanced behind her to check the girls were still okay. "But Harry Potter isn't. Thomas has gone to kill him, and I can't do anything to help him."

"We know. Cassandra is here." Cassandra had stayed overnight to comfort a distraught Katherine, who'd collapsed when she'd heard about her brother. "Where are you?"

"With Maddie and Bella in a restaurant in San Diego. I'm taking them to the zoo." Lucy felt as though the world had gone crazy around her. "Can you believe it? I'm going to the fucking zoo and he's gone to kill Harry."

"It's not your fault, Lucy." Remus knew that there was little Lucy could do. "Cassandra wants to speak to you."

Lucy heard the sound of voices and then Cassandra came on the line. "Lucy, I'm so sorry. Harry had told me you were on our side, and what you had to do. Do you want us to extract you?"

"No, I'm the last person you've got left." Lucy wanted to say yes but couldn't. "And I'm not in any danger right now. However, the locations of BritAD and the Ministry's new HQ may be. Warn Commander Sebastian that Thomas intends to try and extract them from Harry."

"I will." Cassandra assured her.

"What went wrong?" Lucy knew that something terrible had to have happened.

"We were overrun trying to get the Slayers out; someone must have spotted one of the Aurors, and raised the alarm, but we don't know for sure." Cassandra's voice was thick from crying, and a lack of sleep. "Then a pupil we missed damaged the vanishing cabinet, and one of us had to stay behind to close it. I wanted to do it, but Harry, Harry Potter that is, refused to let me. He said that he was never

going to be the one to take Thomas down, and so he stayed." Cassandra started to cry again.

Lucy was glad that she'd taken a calming potion otherwise she'd have been in the same condition. "I couldn't help him. I've begged Thomas to be lenient but I doubt he's going to."

"I don't think so either." Cassandra hiccupped as she battled her tears. "Lucy, does Thomas suspect you?"

"He made a thinly veiled threat this morning, but he ended up apologizing when I went ballistic at him." Lucy looked around again to check on the two girls. "Cassandra, I'm going to have to go. I can't leave the girls alone for too long."

"Take care of them, and be careful." Cassandra warned.

"I will." Lucy hung up and used the restroom, before returning to the girls with a smile plastered on her face. "That's better. Are we enjoying the waffles?"

Maddie grinned. "Yeah."

"It's yes, young lady." Lucy castigated her. "Only I get to say yeah."

Maddie rolled her eyes. "Yes, Luce."

"A little less eye-rolling and a little more eating please." Lucy tickled Bella under the chin. "How's your waffle, Christabella?"

"Me is Bella." Bella reminded Lucy of the shortened version of her name that everyone used. "No Cwistella."

Lucy smiled a genuine smile for the first time that morning. "Then Bella it is."

Bella beamed and continued gnawing at her waffle. "Where my Daddy?"

"He's going to meet us for lunch." Lucy ruffled the little girl's hair as she revealed where the girls were going. "But first we're going to the zoo."

"Can we go now?" Maddie, as ever, was excited to learn of their destination.

"It doesn't open yet." Lucy pushed Maddie's glass of milk back towards. "Now be a good girl and drink your milk."

Castrum House

Harry Potter groaned as he lifted his head to find Thomas sitting on a chair, his feet crossed casually in front of him.

Thomas got up. "Awake at last. I was beginning to think you'd never recover."

"Why don't you just get on with it, and kill me?" Harry knew he had no chance of escape.

"Oh, don't worry, I will." Thomas reached into his pocket. "But it isn't going to be the easy death you seek."

Harry blanched as he realized what was in the vial that Thomas was holding. "Silver nitrate."

"I see your potions lessons didn't go to waste." Thomas smirked. "And I consider it a fitting end for a traitorous bastard like you."

"A fucker like you would." Harry snarled at him, uncaring of what he was saying now. "Go ahead and do it. I don't care. I've done what I set out to do."

"You freed them all, I know." Thomas took a small knife from the table. "This belonged to your mother; it was one of the set she used on Sebastian."

Harry had lost count of the cuts he now had on his body. "A little unrefined for you, isn't it?"

"A little." Thomas took great care not to touch the ultra sharp blade. "But one has to work within one's limitations."

Harry howled with pain as Thomas drove the knife into his shoulder. "Fuck." He panted as he strove to overcome the pain. "What was on that?"

"Nothing. It's just plain old silver." Thomas smiled. "Still hurts though, doesn't it? Tell me, Harry, how does it feel to know I could do anything to you?"

Harry's shoulder felt as if it were on fire, but he wasn't going to give Thomas the satisfaction of knowing he was afraid of him. "Do whatever you want. All that matters to me is that my family, and my friends are safe."

"Speaking of friends; you never touched Cassandra, did you?" Thomas had to know whether Harry had or not.

"Not a finger." Harry admitted. "Except for the displays we put on for you. She's a bloody accomplished actress, isn't she?"

"So it would seem; just as you yourself must be accomplished." Thomas' next question stemmed from being unable to question Lucius, who'd vanished. "How did you manage to persuade Lucius and his men to take the vanishing cabinet down into the antechamber?"

Harry smirked, and morphed into Thomas. "Surprise. Lucius would never refuse an order from you."

Thomas sucked in his breath. "You're a metamorphagus?"

"Yep." Harry changed back into himself. "It's one of the many attributes I got from my stepmother after the Abrogo ritual."

"Well played." Thomas turned his wand on Harry, and made him scream as the Cruciatus curse ripped through him. "Really, Harry, well played."

When he was released from the spell, Harry was gasping for breath. "Just finish this."

Thomas tutted. "Now, now. Let's not rush things. Most people aren't in such a hurry to die. First, I want to know where the new location for the Ministry and BritAD are located, and then I want the names of anyone helping you. I already know about Simon, and I'll be dealing with him when I find him."

"You can go fuck yourself." Harry coughed, and spat out the blood that his spasms drove from his lungs.

"Wrong answer." Thomas snapped, and aimed his wand at Harry.

Harry bit back a scream as several inch-deep cuts scored their way across his already bloody chest. "You can do whatever you want. I'm not talking."

Thomas uncorked the vial. "We'll see, shall we?"

The next half an hour were the worst of Harry's life, and he'd never known pain like it before. But even though he'd found himself begging Thomas to stop, he still refused to talk. Thomas circled him. "You've proved more resilient than I thought you would."

Harry could by now barely breathe, let alone answer. Thomas grabbed his hair. "Veritaserum didn't work; threatening you didn't work; torture didn't work. You really are a tough nut to crack, Harry." Thomas pulled Harry's hair as Harry's eyes closed. "Wakey, wakey. I've got one last trick up my sleeve. Legilimens."

Harry's voice returned as he screamed in agony as white hot pain lanced through his brain as Thomas forged through his mind. He knew, however, that the oaths he'd sworn would protect everyone and everything he held dear. But by the time it was over, Harry was sobbing openly, snot, blood and sweat coating his body.

Thomas knew he'd have to admit defeat, and he pulled Harry's head back. "You were loyal to the death; it's just a pity you chose the wrong side to be loyal to." He then forced open Harry's mouth. "Enjoy your next life, Potter."

After pouring the silver nitrate down Harry's throat, Thomas stood and watched impassively as for almost ten minutes Harry screamed and contorted as the potion began to eat away at him. Eventually, combined with his earlier injuries, it became too much for his body, and he collapsed limply against his chains, his lungs sucking in one final gasp of air before he was forever silent.

Thomas placed a portkey on the body and it disappeared. He then turned and left the room.

The Ministry of Magic

A white-faced Harry Sebastian marched past Sirius' private secretary. "The Minister will be unavailable for the rest of the day." Once inside, Harry closed the door. "Sirius, I've got bad news."

Sirius glanced up at Harry. He knew it had to be serious if Harry was calling him by his name again, as Harry still wasn't speaking to him. "Is it about Harry?"

"You need to come with me to St. Mungo's. Room 640." Harry didn't get a chance to say anything else; to warn Sirius before he vanished.

Overriding the wards, Sirius apparated directly to the specified spot, stopping in horror as he found not a severely injured patient, but a body lying under a sheet. With a trembling hand, Sirius lifted the sheet and dropped to his knees. "No."

Harry, who'd apparated in right behind Sirius, placed a hand on the man's shoulder. Finally ending the cold war between them, Harry commiserated with his father-in-law. "I'm so sorry, Sirius. I thought you should know. I haven't told James or Severus yet."

Sirius could feel Harry himself was shaking, and tears began to slip down his cheeks. "I'll tell them."

"Do you want me to come with you?" Harry offered as he hauled Sirius back to his feet, hugging his father-in-law, who returned the embrace before stepping back.

"No." Sirius wiped away yet more tears as he thought about how he was ever going to be able to tell his friend that his son had died. "Can you just make sure..." Sirius' voice hitched. "You know."

"I do." Harry tugged the sheet back over Harry Potter's body as Sirius vanished.

Sirius found James alone, pacing the floor in the conservatory. "James, I..."

James could see that Sirius had been crying. "It's Harry, isn't it? I kept hoping he'd find some way out."

Sirius made a valiant effort not to cry again. "I'm sorry. His bo... I mean..."

James' stopped Sirius from saying the words by interrupting. "Where is he?"

"St. Mungo's." Sirius' voice was harsher than usual, tears making it difficult to respond.

James strove to keep a lock on his emotions. He turned a pain-filled face to his friend. "Why, Sirius, why him?"

Sirius had only one answer for his friend. "He did it to give us a chance." Sirius then pulled an unresisting James into his arms as his friend started to sob. "I'm so sorry, James."

James clung to Sirius as a drowning man would to a piece of flotsam, and sobbed out his grief. "I barely got to know him again."

"I know." Sirius held James tighter as huge tremors wracked his friend's body. "It's my fault. I should never have let him go back to Seville. I should have refused."

James knew that it wasn't Sirius' fault. "He'd have done with or without your help." James coughed and pulled away, trying to get a grip on himself. "Severus will have to be told."

"I'll do it." Sirius offered. "Where do you want Harry to be taken?"

James didn't try to stop the tears that were still coursing down his cheeks as he responded. "Snape House. He loved it there, and I think it's only right he's buried there."

"But he's your son, James." Sirius protested.

"He was also Severus' son, Sirius." James removed his glasses as he could no longer see through them. "And he was there for Harry when I wasn't."

"I'll sort it." Sirius didn't agree but wasn't willing to distress his friend further by continuing to argue with him. "I'll also arrange to let whoever else needs to know what's happened."

James let out a sob. "It's not fair, Sirius. It's not fucking fair." James picked up a plant pot and hurled it through the conservatory window.

Sirius knew exactly how James felt. "I'll get Tonks. Where is she?"

"I'm here." Tonks had heard the glass break, and come running.

James turned into the comfort of his wife's arms, and Sirius left them alone. Walking into the sitting room, he found a nervous looking boy sitting on H.J.'s lap. "Daddy broke a plant pot, and cut his finger. Mummy's helping to kiss it better." Sirius explained the noise and why Tonks had gone running out. "Would you like to go and play with Callie?"

Little James' face lit up. "Me play Muggles."

"You do that." Sirius swung the little boy up into his arms, and took him to his home, quickly explaining to his wife what had happened, before returning to speak to H.J. "He didn't make it, H.J."

"I knew the moment I heard the glass break." H.J. rose up, grimacing as the pain in his leg shot through him. He'd been injured fighting, and had been one of the first Aurors to be evacuated. "Can I do anything?"

"No." Sirius took several cleansing breaths. "I need to see Severus."

Snape House

Severus, as James had, knew immediately. "He didn't get out, did he?"

Sirius shook his head. "I'm sorry, Severus."

"Harry knew the risks." Severus had talked with the young man he considered his son often enough to know his mindset. "But it still doesn't make it any easier."

"James wants Harry to be buried here." Sirius would have thought Severus a cold bastard if he hadn't seen the single tear that slipped down his old school nemesis' cheek, a bruise already there from the punch that Harry had inflicted on him to knock him out.

Severus refused. "It wouldn't be fitting. As much as I loved, still do love, Harry, he was the Potter heir, and deserves a burial befitting his status. But I'd like his funeral to leave from here."

Sirius held out his hand to Severus. "Your son was a very brave man."

Severus recognized the gesture for what it was and shook hands with Sirius. "He was."

Sirius then turned and left to return to the Ministry. And Severus left to tell his children the news of their brother.

San Francisco

Luna and Hermione apparated directly into Cammie's hallway, to find her changing her son in the family room. "Cam, I need to talk to you."

Cammie turned around a smile on her face until she saw the red-rimmed eyes of the two women. "Luna, are the children okay?"

"Yes." Luna took Cammie's hand. "I've got bad news for you, and there's no easy way to say it. Harry's dead."

"Uncle Harry?" Cammie asked.

"No. Harry Potter." Luna enfolded Cammie in her arms as the young woman began to cry.

Cammie couldn't stop her tears. "How did he die?"

Luna couldn't bear to tell her about how Harry had really died. "He gave himself up to help everyone get out of Hogwarts."

"I didn't ask that, Luna. How did Thomas kill him?" Cammie knew it couldn't have been good from the way Luna was avoiding telling her.

"I don't know." Luna didn't look at her friend, however, as she responded.

"Don't lie." Cammie's voice rose. "How did he die, Luna?"

"Silver nitrate." Luna turned as Sam also began to cry, his little face showing distress at the sound of his mother's tears. "Mummy's not feeling very well, sweetie."

Far too young to understand what was wrong or what Luna was saying, Sam needed his mother's reassurance but Cammie was in no fit state to give it. Hermione scooped her grandson into her arms. "Nanny Hermione's here, Sam. It's alright, baby."

After being cuddled by his grandmother, Sam soon quieted down, Hermione's voice soothing him. "I'll take him to the nursery."

Luna pulled her cell phone out of her pocket and dialed Regulus' private line, and without preamble told him what she wanted. "It's Luna. Cammie needs you now."

Regulus knew it had to be important for Luna to phone him at work. "I'll be there as soon as I can."

"I'll get you. Is your office empty?" When Regulus confirmed it was, Luna let go of Cammie. "I'm going to get Reg." She then vanished, reappearing moments later with Regulus in tow.

Cammie's howls got louder when Regulus pulled her into his arms, and Luna spoke to Regulus. "Hermione's here. I'll ask her to take Sam home with her for tonight."

"Thanks." Regulus then turned his attention to his wife. Between sobs, Regulus extracted what was wrong with her, and he experienced no small measure of respect for Harry as he knew how much of a risk his wife's former boyfriend had taken, and exactly what Thomas would have done to him. "I'm sorry, Cam."

"I hated him for all that time, and all the time he was only trying to do what was right." Cammie could barely believe he was gone. "I should have done more to help him."

Regulus was taken aback as Cammie's words registered with him. "You knew he was spying on Thomas?"

"Yes. I've known ever since I was rescued from Castrum House." Cammie verified she had. "I couldn't tell you, Reg. I couldn't take the chance that you'd betray him to Thomas."

Regulus was hurt that Cammie hadn't trusted him. "You could have told me. I would never have betrayed your trust."

"Not consciously." Cammie placed both her hands on Regulus' face. "Please understand."

"But you lied to me, Cam." Regulus removed her hands.

"No, I didn't." Cammie refuted his words. "I just didn't tell you. Just as you kept Thomas' secrets, I kept Harry's."

"Is it because you still have feelings for him?" Regulus felt insecure for the first time in his life about Cammie's love for him, and it was over a dead man.

"I cared about Harry. He even offered to marry me so that Sam wouldn't be born a squib." Cammie finally revealed what Harry had proposed. "But I told him that I'd rather have your non-magical son and live alone for the rest of my life, than marry him. I didn't love him, Reg. I love you, and it's time you started to believe that. And you've got to stop believing that I'm suddenly going to walk out on you because you're not magical."

Regulus had admitted his deepest insecurity to Cammie several times, and now, faced with the truth about Harry and his offer, he finally accepted what she was telling him. "If you were going to pick someone magical, you'd have chosen him, wouldn't you?"

"Yes." Cammie cupped Regulus' face again. "But I didn't, I chose you, and Harry's gone now."

Regulus lifted Cammie onto his lap, and rocked her as she started to cry again.

BritAD

Harry Sebastian stood up as James came in. "I'm sorry, James."

"It's not your fault, Harry." James sat down, his face pale but composed. "I just can't believe he's gone."

"I've already identified Harry, so you won't have to do that." Harry had wanted to spare James from the sight of how badly Harry's body had been mutilated from the torture he'd undergone, as well as from the damage from the silver nitrate. He held out an envelope. "These were around his neck. You might want to return them to the Potter vault."

James opened the envelope, and extracted a gold chain, and what appeared to be an engagement ring and two wedding rings. "They're not Potter heirlooms. He must have bought them when he asked Cammie to consider marrying him." James closed his fist around them. "He really never got over losing her."

"I think that's why he wanted to stay." Harry conjectured. "It was a way of stopping the pain. If I'd been in his shoes I'd have done the same myself."

"What happened out there?" James had gotten a rough idea from Sirius but as he hadn't been there, he'd been unable to say in detail.

Harry started to tell him, the first part being word of mouth from Destin.

The Previous Day

At the gates, Harry Potter shook hands with Destin. "I hear that you want a tour of Hogwarts."

"I do." Destin marched in through the gates with Harry, a guard of four following behind them. "Is everything set up for it?"

"We'll be ready to go in about fifteen minutes." Harry informed him. "We'll be making an unscheduled stop first."

"You have found me someone to keep me company?" Destin nudged Harry. "Is she pretty?"

"Blond, beautiful and French." Harry headed into the Academy.

When they left ten minutes later, Destin had his arm around the shoulders of a young woman, and the guards all smirked at each other, believing she was to be his plaything for the night. One of them warned the Frenchman. "I'd be careful with her. The last guy to mess with one of these girls ended up with two broken arms."

"I am more than capable of dealing with this little one." Destin smirked, even though he knew the guard couldn't see his face beneath his mask. "And unlike the previous idiot, I have a hostage."

Harry opened his cloak to reveal a small boy strapped to his chest. "Let this be a lesson to you. Never underestimate the power of leverage."

Not wearing a white mask, the guard grinned at Harry. "You going to share her?"

"What do you think?" Harry laughed, and carried on walking.

Destin pulled the woman along. "Show me the way, Simus."

Dismissing the guards at the door, Harry and Destin walked inside Hogwarts. "This way."

Once they reached the teacher's entrance to the antechamber off the Great Hall, and had closed and locked the door behind them, Harry unstrapped the little boy, and handed him to his mother. "Nicole, you're going to step into the vanishing cabinet. You'll come out in Remus' house."

"What about Neville?" Nicole asked about her husband.

"We will get him out." Destin opened the door; he could sense her apprehension. "Do not be afraid. Harry Sebastian has already tried it out, and it works."

Nicole held her son close to her and climbed into the cabinet. "Thank you."

"I will see you later." Destin then closed the door. "Two down and far too many to go."

"Katherine won't be in the main hall." Harry's sister always ate in her rooms with the children. "I'll go fetch her. The men are used to seeing her in my company, so it won't create a problem if they see us. However, they believe you to be otherwise engaged, so stay here."

"I will be waiting." Destin withdrew both of his wands. "Hurry."

Five minutes later, Harry arrived back carrying both of his nieces, and being trailed by Katherine, who looked tired. "Katie, take her." Harry handed over Oriana, Katherine's youngest daughter first. He then bent down to speak to her eldest. "You're going on a magic trip, Ellie. Hold Mummy's hand." He removed his mask and kissed Katherine's cheek. "Tell Harry that we're ready for him. I love you."

"I love you too, Harry." Katherine smiled worriedly at her brother. "Don't take any risks."

"I won't." Harry promised. "Now off you go."

Harry closed the door, and then stepped aside as a few minutes later Aurors began to stream in, being transported in six at a time. Finally Harry Sebastian came through. "Where's Cass?"

"In our rooms as you requested." Harry was aware that Harry Sebastian didn't want his wife in the firing line unless necessary. "I'll get her once the hall is secure."

Harry Sebastian turned to the assembled men; almost half of whom were from the French Auror Division. "Teams A, B and C, you will head over to the Academy. You have a license to kill if necessary. Get those girls and their watchers out and then get back here."

A large portion of the Aurors disappeared as they placed vanishing spells on themselves and headed out of the door and into the hallway. Once the door closed again, Harry addressed the remaining teams. "You each know who to mark. On my signal, secure them. I do not want any combative spells cast unless it becomes absolutely necessary. Getting the pupils and staff out safely is our main priority."

Again the rear door opened, and under cover of silencing and invisibility spells, the Aurors filed out, making their way carefully into the Great Hall, taking their places behind the assigned individuals. Harry too made his way in under the same cloaking device. He immediately noticed that several key Death Eaters were missing,

including Greyback and Malfoy, but had little choice except to proceed if the plan had any chance of succeeding. Aiming his wand in the air, Harry almost silently sent a spell hurtling to the very top of the roof of the Great Hall. "Vegrandis Angelus Candeo."

Little gasps began around the hall as tiny sparkling angels appeared in the air. Gasps that turned into angry shouts as some pupils and Death Eaters alike found themselves magically cuffed. All the Aurors then dropped their spells.

James got to his feet as Harry Sebastian dropped his own spell. "All Houses will leave via the side door entrance to the Antechamber. File out in twos starting with Ravenclaw. Now go."

Harry shook hands with James. "Can I leave you in charge here?"

"Of course." James turned. "There are three pupils in the Infirmary, as is Poppy."

"I'll get them." Calico offered.

"Take Jakes and his team as well." Harry ordered. "I'm going to get my wife. I'll be back as soon as I can. Just keep the line moving; I don't know how much time we've got. If things go sour, barricade the doors, and try to hold them off until everyone is out."

"We will." James walked off, assigning teachers to cover the groups as they left the Hall.

Cassandra was pacing the bedroom when Harry unlocked the door. "Harry bloody well locked me in."

"I told him to." Harry grabbed his wife's arm. "Come on, I need to join my teams outside, and you're leaving with the others."

"No, I'm not. I'm still an Auror, Harry." Cassandra argued as Harry hustled her along the corridor until they both stopped when a silver masked man blocked the stairway. "Wand, Harry."

Harry had already drawn both of his wands. "Just get behind me."

"Give me a fucking wand." Cassandra snarled at her husband, as she pushed him to the side to avoid the green spell that came from behind them.

Harry fired at the man in front of him as he passed his secondary wand to Cassandra to defend them against the two Death Eaters running up the corridor behind them. "Reducto."

"Constricio Gutter." Lucius whipped his wand through the air aiming at Cassandra, not Harry.

As Lucius and Harry then traded curses, Cassandra had hit the ground to avoid Lucius' first spell, while aiming at one of the Death Eaters heading her way. "Reducto."

They shielded, and Cassandra resorted to one of Harry's favorite spells, and she aimed her wand at the floor in front of her since the two Death Eaters were rapidly gaining ground. "Humus Labefactus Promittus." Never having come across the spell before, both Death Eaters were caught unaware, and lost their footing. Having seen Lucius in several demonstrations, she knew exactly how the Death Eater fought, so Cassandra yelled at her husband. "Swap."

Trusting her judgment, Harry switched places with his wife, and began to deal with the two downed men while Cassandra took on Lucius. She first batted away several mid-range spells before coming back with one of her own. "Serpensortia. Serpensortia. Serpensortia."

With Cassandra's use of the threefold spell, Lucius suddenly found himself being attacked by three snakes at once. Having stunned one of the Death Eaters, Harry hissed. "Bite the silver face, and then come to me."

Over Harry's shoulder, Cassandra aimed her wand at the Death Eater who'd gotten to his feet, and sent a Reducto spell at him as Harry did the same. The sheer combined power of their spells blasted a large hole straight through the Death Eater's chest, and he was dead before he even hit floor. Both then turned their attention to

Lucius, who had dispatched two snakes, and was about to deal with the third when Harry aimed his wand at him. "Stupefy."

As Lucius shielded, the snake, which wasn't affected by the shield, sank its fangs into his leg, making Lucius lose concentration; a situation of which Cassandra took advantage. "Stupefy." Lucius crumpled to the ground.

Harry called the snake to him, and it wrapped around his arm. He then slung Lucius over his shoulder. "Let's get this one into custody. Seville can deal with the one I've left alive."

As Harry reached the entrance to the Great Hall, two slayers ran in, panting. "There's almost a hundred Death Eaters out there. Your people need help."

Harry dropped Lucius to the floor, uncaring if he injured him, and starting barking out orders to those Aurors still in the Great Hall. "Jackson, Latin, Holyhead and McMasters stay here. Everyone else get out there and get the rest of those girls in." He turned to Cassandra. "I want you out of here, and that's an order, Sebastian."

"Tough, Sir." Cassandra ignored Harry's order. "You can discipline me later if you want to." She then ran off to follow the other Aurors.

Harry swore before turning to Harry Potter. "Get Malfoy secured, and out of here. You're to stay here."

"Yes, Sir." Unlike Cassandra, Harry couldn't tell his superior to basically stick it. "I'll take care of any straggling Death Eaters."

"Just get those pupils and anyone from the Academy out as they come in." Harry barked. He then turned and ran. Once outside, he stopped as he took in the carnage that was going on. The slayers hadn't exaggerated about the numbers, and Harry knew that someone must have managed to sound an alert. Throwing himself into the fighting, he did everything he could to shield the slayers that were trying to make their way into Hogwarts. Luckily they were quick, and able to avoid a lot of the spells, but not all of them made it, more so the watchers who'd also been imprisoned as they just weren't fast

enough. The numbers were starting to thin out when Cassandra screamed as a hand shot around her throat.

H.J., being the closest Auror to her, span around to find Greyback holding her. "Let her go."

Greyback laughed. "I don't think so, Sebastian, and don't think of coming any closer. I'll snap the pretty's neck if you do."

H.J. held up both hands. "Fine, just don't hurt her."

"Now call this off." Greyback demanded.

Cassandra gasped as Greyback's hand tightened around her throat. "Don't do it."

H.J. ducked as a spell went flying by him. "I just want you to know that if you don't let her go, you're going to die."

"I know nothing of the..." Greyback's next words were a mere gurgle as a silver knife sliced his throat from ear to ear, spraying Cassandra with blood. As his lifeblood gushed from his body, the werewolf's reaction was to grab at his neck with both hands, freeing Cassandra from his grasp.

"Accio Cassandra." H.J. pulled Cassandra out of the firing line.

Greyback staggered around to find he was facing Harry Sebastian. As the stricken werewolf dropped to his knees, Harry wiped his blade on the fallen werewolf's shoulder. "I told you what I'd do to you if you ever touched my wife again." Harry watched realization dawn. "Yes, that was me at the table, and not Simus. You should have listened." Harry kicked the werewolf onto his back, and left him to bleed out.

Cassandra had never seen Harry look so menacing before, and she shivered. "I need my wand."

Harry picked it up and threw it to her, just as a curse hit H.J. in the leg. Harry dropped down to check the wound, and cast a blood stopping

curse on it. "H.J., I can't apply another temporary field dressing over the one you already have on this. Get out. That's an order."

"I'll help him." Cassandra helped H.J. to his feet, relying on Harry to cover them, as she'd just done while Harry had checked on H.J.

She rejoined the battle a short time later to find that the numbers were dwindling. Harry called out to her. "How much longer do we need to hold out?"

"Another ten minutes would be good." Casandra yelled back, dropping and rolling to avoid a killing curse as she returned fire.

Harry immediately killed the Death Eater who'd just tried to assassinate his wife. And no more than two or three minutes had gone by when Harry swore as he spotted the gold masked individual marching up the field towards him. "Oh fuck."

Present time

Harry stopped to take a drink of water. "I told Cassandra I was going to take Seville on, and I told Destin to get Cassandra out. Then Destin hit me and stunned me, and that was the last thing I remember until I was enervated by Cassandra."

James got up. "I need to speak to Cassandra."

Harry also got to his feet. "She's at Remus' place. Taking care of Katherine and Nicole."

James shook his head in dismay at their second loss of the night. "Augusta is going to be heartbroken."

"The Longbottom curse strikes again." Harry came around the desk. "Or at least that's what everyone will say."

Every male Longbottom had died an early death, or suffered a fate that would have made death a blessing. "They should call it the Longbottom bravery. Neville's shielding those pupils with his body saved their lives when Blenkinsopp turned on them."

"I'll recommend to Sirius that Neville be awarded an Order posthumously as well as for all those who died." Harry drew James into a hug. "I'd come but I have too much to do here. I've more than thirty families to inform that their loved ones aren't coming back."

"I understand only too well, Harry." James swallowed back the tears that were still so close to the surface. He hesitated before leaving. "Tell them that they made a difference."

"I will." Harry closed the door, and got to work.

October 24th 2012

Lucy waited for Thomas to go into his meeting, before slipping out of her office, and taking the elevator to the ground. Finding the nearest public phone, she put in a reverse charge call to Remus. "Remus, I need you to pass a message on to Commander Sebastian."

"He's here." Remus called out, and Harry came on the line. "Lucy, was is it?"

"I'm going to deal with Thomas, Sir." Lucy had thought long and hard about her decision. "We're running out of time, and I don't see any other way of doing this."

"Don't be so hasty. We've still got two months to go, Lucy." Harry didn't want Lucy doing anything rash. "I'll find another way."

"Then I'll give you four weeks, Sir." Lucy wasn't willing to risk waiting until the last minute to carry out her plan, just in case it failed. "But if you can't find any other way, then I'm going to do it."

"How?" Harry asked.

"He doesn't wear his wands in bed." Lucy revealed to her superior what he already suspected; that she was sleeping with Thomas. "I'll kill him while he's sleeping."

"I'm only going to let you do that if everything else fails." Harry didn't want her to do it as it would mean Lucy's own death but he knew that they might have little choice.

"Okay, Sir." Lucy took a deep breath. "I have to admit, it's going to be my last resort."

"I hope so." Harry preferred for himself to make that sacrifice. "You'd better get back to wherever you've snuck out of."

"Yes, Sir." Lucy then hung up.

Unfortunately, when the next full moon came around a few days later, Lucy's intentions were about to be derailed.

Next Chapter: Lucy finds that she's no longer able to sacrifice herself; Cammie comes up with an alternative plan; Luna gets a chance to send Thomas to an early grave.

Chapter 84: Flight

October 29th 2012

The Island

Just before moonrise, Lucy closed the door to the cell she was going to spend the night in. After placing her wand and wristwatch in the niche on the wall and sliding back the cover, she pulled off her clothes, and lay down on the bed under the covers, and waited for the moon to rise. Ten minutes later she was still waiting. Frowning, she got up and checked the time. "It must be wrong."

After replacing the watch, she lay back down, and continued to wait. Two hours later she knew that she hadn't gotten the time wrong but something else was most definitely amiss. Afraid to leave the cell in case a change came upon her suddenly, Lucy grabbed her wand and transfigured the small bed into something more comfortable, and settled down to go to sleep, but it was the early hours before sleep came to her.

When Thomas unlocked the cell the next day, he was surprised to find Lucy asleep in a very different bed than he'd expected. "Lucy?"

Lucy shot upright. "What time is it?"

"Almost eight." Thomas knelt down by the bed. "Why are you still in here?"

"I didn't go to sleep until late." Lucy stretched. "Can you pass me my robe?"

Thomas floated down the large robe from a shelf high above them. "Here. Why isn't the bed damaged?" He was used to seeing a shredded pile of material after Lucy's night changes, even after she'd taken Wolfsbane.

"I didn't change." Lucy had to tell him the truth. "I waited and waited and nothing happened. I need to check the calendar; see if I made a mistake."

"You didn't." Thomas watched as Lucy wrapped the robe around herself. "You're sure you didn't change?"

"Not unless I did it in the early hours of the morning and kept sleeping." Lucy tugged on her slippers that Thomas also floated down. "I'm going to the library."

"I'll come with you." Thomas offered.

The two of them extracted several books on werewolves, Lucy finding first what she was looking for. "Oh Merlin."

Thomas took the crumbling book from her, and began to read the passage she had found.

'Werewolf bitches, unlike their male counterparts, have the ability to avoid transforming. This ability manifests itself when the bitch falls pregnant. It is believed to be a defense mechanism to stop the body rejecting the fetus after conception, although sometimes the change still can occur during the first month of pregnancy. After giving birth, the bitch still maintains this ability until the child, or cub, reaches adolescence. However, she also has the gift to change at will during this time in order to protect her offspring if necessary.'

"I can't be pregnant." Lucy swallowed. "We've been too careful."

"There's one way to find out." Thomas took Lucy's hand.

"Don't apparate me anywhere." Lucy tugged her hand free. "How do I know it's safe if I'm wrong?"

Thomas hadn't thought about that. "I'll get Rivers to come and check you out. Make sure that everything is alright."

"Thank you." Lucy let out a long breath as Thomas vanished, before continuing to read the next passage on werewolves and births.

'Bitches usually give birth to between one to four cubs, and they are always female. While not exactly rare, successful conception usually

only takes place between dogs and bitches, but it is not unheard of for a Muggle or wizard to father a cub.'

Lucy slammed the book shut, and put it back in the receiving tray, before heading out to sit by the pool. Her inner soliloquy was interrupted by Thomas' return. "I needed some fresh air."

"Rivers is in our room." Thomas took Lucy's hand and led her inside.

Lucy waited anxiously as she was scanned by the healer. "Am I pregnant or not?"

"You're pregnant." The healer confirmed. "Approximately six weeks or thereabouts."

Lucy couldn't answer; she was far too stunned, and the healer's next words went straight over her head. She barely even noticed Thomas thanking the healer before sitting down with Lucy. "Are you alright?"

"I don't know." Lucy felt as though she was thinking through a fog. "I can't believe it."

"I'm a little surprised myself. It must have been that first time. I couldn't have cast the spell properly; my mind was rather preoccupied." Thomas put his arm around Lucy. "But I'll take good care of you."

"I know." Lucy responded but her mind was elsewhere, and she only answered automatically as Thomas began to talk about what he wanted now that she was pregnant.

However, she came swiftly back to reality as she realized what Thomas had just said. "You can't be serious."

"I'm totally serious, Lucy." Thomas had expected her to react as she was doing. "I want to marry you."

"But you're already married." Lucy pointed out. "You'd be a bigamist."

"I wouldn't be if it's a Muggle marriage. I'm divorced in the Muggle world." Thomas had looked into the legal issues when he'd agreed to Mione's divorce. "And while it's uncommon, it can be done."

"No." Lucy flat out refused. "Absolutely not."

"Lucy, I want my daughter to be legitimate. She has to be legitimate to inherit anything in the Seville family line." Thomas argued.

"I thought you intended to live forever, Thomas." Lucy reminded Thomas of his plans. "So it doesn't matter whether or not she can inherit."

"Lucy, please. I want her to be legitimate." Thomas pleaded.

"No." Lucy stood her ground, aware that Thomas wouldn't hurt her now. "So just drop the subject."

Thomas stormed off.

After several more heated arguments, they were now barely speaking as four days later, Thomas apparated Lucy off the Island and into Miami, Rivers saying that it would be best if she left now, and advising against any further apparition or portkeying; portkeying more so than anything else as this was known to cause miscarriages in female werewolves.

After delivering Lucy to the villa he was renting for the foreseeable future, Thomas turned around, intending to leave. "Take today off. I'm going into the office."

With them not speaking, Lucy's access to his movements had been curtailed, and she knew she couldn't let things go on like that. "Thomas, wait."

"Have you reconsidered my offer?" Thomas immediately brought up the subject uppermost in his mind.

"No." Lucy sighed when she saw an angry look cross his face. "But I'm sick of arguing about it, and getting the cold shoulder."

"What do you expect?" Thomas wasn't ready to give up on the subject. "Most women would jump at an opportunity like that."

"But I'm not most women." Lucy snapped. "If I were, I wouldn't be in the position I am now." She took Thomas' hand, and threw him an olive branch. "Look, I'll think about it, okay?"

Thomas began to unbend. "Promise me that you'll consider it carefully."

"I promise." Lucy softened her voice, and was promptly pulled into Thomas' arms at her agreement. When he kissed her, she half-wished she could have kept the cold war between them going but it would have been counterproductive.

Letting go of Lucy with one arm, Thomas took out of his cell phone, and called his secretary, dropping kisses on Lucy's neck as he did so. "I'll be late in." He then dropped his cell phone to the floor, his hands sinking into Lucy's hair as he kissed her.

Cursing herself for not realizing that Thomas might react like this, Lucy had little choice but to respond, and before she knew it, Thomas was tugging her into his bedroom, and closing the door behind them.

November 6th 2012

After making sure that Thomas had gone into his meeting, Lucy slipped out of her office, and headed to the nearest call box, and quickly put in a call to Remus. "I don't suppose Commander Sebastian is there."

"He's not but I can apparate to get him." Remus offered.

"Please." Lucy waited a few minutes, and then Harry came on the line. "Sir, I'm afraid that I won't be able to take Thomas out as I'd planned."

"Are you alright?" Harry wondered what had gone wrong.

"Not exactly. I'm pregnant." Lucy revealed why her change of heart had come about.

"I'm extracting you then." Harry immediately decided that Lucy's time for taking risks had come to an end. "I don't care what the stakes are, you're being brought home."

Lucy wanted nothing more. "Please do. Thomas is talking about marrying me, and that's the last thing I need."

"Marrying you?" Harry was flabbergasted. "As in a Muggle marriage? Can he do that?"

"Apparently so." Lucy confirmed. "He wants his daughter to be legitimate."

"Where are you?" Harry asked, his urgency apparent even over the phone. "I'll come myself."

Lucy swore, when through the bushes, she saw a familiar face coming towards where she was standing. "Thomas is coming. I have to go." She hung up the phone, and sat down on the bench next to it, her head in her hands to hide her pale and nervous face.

Thomas had come out of his meeting to ask for something from Lucy. Not finding her, his secretary told him that she'd seen Lucy enter the elevator, and security had pointed him in her direction. "Are you alright?"

"Just feeling queasy." Lucy lied easily. "I thought some fresh air might help."

"I'll call a car to take you back to the villa." Thomas flipped open his cell phone, and demanded a car. "On second thoughts, I'll come with you. You look awfully pale."

"Stay here." Lucy still hoped to slip out of Thomas' clutches.

"You're my responsibility." Thomas opened the car door when it arrived. "I'll call Janice and ask her to put the meeting back to another

day." He then told the driver to take them home, before calling his secretary. "Janice, it's Thomas. I'll be working from home for the next few days as Lucy isn't well." A pause ensued, and Thomas answered the question that Janice had asked before closing his cell phone.

On the drive home, Lucy sat quietly, knowing that she'd lost the opportunity to leave. All at once exhaustion and despair flooded her, and she subserviently let Thomas shepherd her into their bedroom once they arrived home. "I just need some sleep. Really, you can go back to the office."

"I'm not leaving you." Thomas pulled back the covers. "Get undressed and into bed."

Lucy reluctantly shed her clothes and slipped into a nightgown, before climbing into the bed, hot tears sliding down her cheeks. Thomas immediately lay down beside her and held her. "It's been a little too much for you, hasn't it?"

Lucy sniffled from the depths of Thomas' chest. "I just feel a little overwhelmed right now. We've only just moved in together, I'm pregnant, and you want to get married."

"I do but it's only because I want to take care of you and our daughter." Thomas kissed Lucy's head, and tipped her chin up. "Lucy, please, will you reconsider my offer of marriage?"

Lucy was about to say no yet again when she realized that a wedding could be the perfect time to extract her, and maybe take Thomas out at the same time. "I don't know, Thomas."

Thomas sensed her wavering. "Say yes, Lucy."

"Yes, Lucy." Lucy smiled through her tears.

Thomas kissed her gently, feeling protective of her for the first time ever. "Thank you."

"If I said yes, there would be some provisos." Lucy started to pull herself together as her mind began to sift through the possibilities a

wedding could bring. "First, I want to do it as soon as possible. I will not go down the aisle looking like the Michelin man."

"How about January?" Thomas suggested, not letting the subject get away.

"If we're going to do it, then I think I'd like to spend our first Christmas together as a married couple." Lucy smiled ingenuously at him, all the time thinking that she'd rather spend the night naked in a snowstorm than ever marry Thomas. "So how about mid-December? We can take a week's honeymoon, and you'll still be back in time to take over the world."

Thomas laughed at her little joke. "So I will. Before then it is. How about the other provisos?"

"I want to get married in the US." Lucy had a simple plea to argue her case. "It's my home country, and it's important to me."

"I feel the same way about my country." Thomas had fallen in love with Australia, and now considered it his own. "My parents would be disappointed if I married elsewhere. And I know the priest of the local church very well."

"Is he one of your lot down under?" Lucy asked out of interest, trying to determine the scope of Thomas' circle in Australia.

"No, he's a friend of Dad's." Even Thomas hadn't been able to bring himself to approach a man of God.

"I'd still rather have the wedding in the US." Lucy continued to object to Thomas' choice of venue.

Thomas countered. "Lucy, there's another reason I want it in Sydney. Reg would be my best man, and I won't risk him in the US or England. He's safe in San Francisco, but when we marry it will attract media attention, and he'd be at risk. Sebastian would have no trouble getting jurisdiction from Michaela Bradford; unlike her husband, she turned me down flat."

Lucy was relieved to hear that the head of USAD hadn't been compromised, but she knew that the woman was going to be hurt when she learned about her husband's deception. She knew she couldn't continue to object without raising suspicion, so she smiled at Thomas. "Sydney it is then."

November 16th 2012

Lucy sat in the solarium with Cammie, who was breastfeeding Sam; Thomas and Regulus were closeted in Regulus' study. "I can't believe that I'll be doing this myself one day with a child of my own."

"So it's just the one you're expecting?" Cammie asked, as she wiped Sam's mouth, and covered herself up.

"Yes." Lucy had discovered that it was just one baby.

"How do you feel about her?" Cammie was aware of how Mione had reacted to her news when she'd believed that she was expecting Thomas' son.

"I want her if that's what you mean." Lucy had also been told by Harry Potter how Mione had felt about her pregnancy.

"I'm glad. It isn't her fault." Cammie began to burp Sam, his little hands tugging her hair as she held him over her shoulder. "How are things between the two of you?"

"We didn't speak for almost a week when I first said no to marrying him." Lucy revealed. "But as you saw when he asked Reg to be his best man, he's throwing himself into this thing."

Cammie looked around and threw up a privacy bubble, changing the subject entirely, and she hurriedly told Lucy what she knew about her. "Lucy, I know you don't want to marry him. Luna told me what you've been doing."

"What?" Lucy was stunned that Luna had spilled the beans, but knew it was her own fault for not extracting an oath from Luna. "Does Reg know?"

"No." Cammie felt terrible that she had again had to hide something from her husband. This time, however, she'd told him that she was hiding something but that she couldn't tell him what it was, and Regulus had told her to keep her secrets, and that he'd say nothing to Thomas. "He knows I have secrets but not what they are."

"Can we stroll around the garden?" Lucy wanted to talk more with Cammie but didn't want to be caught with a privacy bubble up if Thomas and Regulus interrupted them suddenly.

"Let me bundle Sam up, and strap him into the stroller, and we can walk to the gazebo at the end of the pathway." Cammie picked her up son, and soon had Sam expertly strapped in, his head lolling as sleep quick overcame him.

Once outside, Lucy told Cammie what she had in mind. "As Luna has told you about me, you'll also know that I'm doing whatever I can to take Thomas down. After what he did to Harry, it's all the bastard deserves."

Cammie swallowed. "I wanted to kill him when he got out of the car today for what he did to Harry, but I'd have ended up dead, and I don't want to leave Reg and my son alone."

"Cammie, you're best out of it." Lucy grabbed Cammie's hand and gently squeezed it. "And it's the last thing Harry would have wanted you to do."

Cammie's eyes welled up. "Do you miss him?"

"Yes." Lucy had to fight her own tears. "He was my friend. It's been even harder for Cassandra. When I last spoke to her, just before the night of the full moon, she was still broken up about his death, and Katherine is even worse."

"It's so hard to lose your brother and your husband." Cammie shivered. "I really wish I had the bravery to kill Thomas myself, but I haven't."

"I was going to." Lucy revealed. "I intended to wait until he was sleeping, and use the killing curse on him, but this one changed things."

"Do you really think you could have done it?" Cammie watched Lucy stroking her stomach.

"Yes. I don't like the idea of taking a life, but his, I would have taken gladly, even though it would have meant my own death." Lucy's voice was quiet but deadly. "That bastard stole more than one friend from me; stole my life; and stole my free will. I hate him, Cammie. I mean I really hate him."

Cammie didn't doubt it. "So if you can't kill him, then what's the plan?"

Lucy told her. "I'm going to ask Commander Sebastian to kidnap me from outside the church. As he's got no jurisdiction in Australia, he'll have to make it look like a Muggle kidnapping; thankfully Thomas is rich enough for it to appear exactly like that."

Cammie thought for a moment. "I've got a better idea. If something were to go wrong at the church, you could find yourself marrying Thomas." Lucy shuddered at the idea as Cammie questioned her. "You're going to have to fly from the US to Australia, aren't you?"

"Yes, on 11th December as I can't portkey or apparate anymore." Lucy confirmed that she had little choice but to travel by Muggle means. "I can floo but Australia is just a little too far."

Cammie smiled. "But Miami International has a floo, portkey and apparition hub. If Uncle Harry can somehow take you from there, he'll be able to floo you somewhere close, say, Orlando, and if he can have a plane waiting, get you out that way."

"That's a little expensive." Lucy pointed out a loophole in Cammie's idea.

"Uncle Harry wouldn't mind." Cammie grinned. "He can take it out of the budget for all those cleaning materials that I know he must make all the naughty trainees and Aurors go through."

Lucy laughed, having fallen prey to the same punishment herself. "You have quite the sense of humor, Cammie. I like you."

"I like you too." Cammie hugged Lucy. "And I know Uncle Harry will get you out."

"He'd understand about you, you know." Lucy could feel longing coming from Cammie.

Cammie shook her head. "No, he wouldn't. And I can never risk Reg and Sam that. I've got Mum, and I've got Luna and Xander, and I'll be content with that."

"What about your brother?" Lucy knew that Sevvv lived with Hermione during the school year.

"I've become Auntie Laine to him." Cammie still hadn't gotten used to her new name, and stuck to her old one when she could. "That way I can still see him, and it won't be obvious who I am."

"Auror Sebastian would have a meltdown if he knew that his son was calling Reg 'Uncle'." Lucy knew that H.J. loathed Regulus from her talks with Harry Potter.

"That's an understatement." Cammie thought about her father. "But Mum said that she wants me in Sevvv's life, so it's this way or no way."

"So you're really happy with such a small group knowing who you really are?" Lucy questioned Cammie's limited association with people from her former life.

"I'd like to think I can add you to the list." Cammie remarked hopefully.

"Always." Lucy patted her stomach. "And this one."

"Thomas is beyond excited about her birth, isn't he?" Cammie had never seen Thomas so animated as when he talked about his and Lucy's plans for the pregnancy.

"Yes, and she's the reason why Thomas will come after me when he learns that I've been arrested." Lucy didn't like using her unborn child as bait but it was the only way to lure Thomas in.

"He loves you as well though, doesn't he?" Cammie had thought Thomas did.

"No." Lucy touched her stomach. "His love is purely for this one." She looked up. "You might not know this but there's a prophecy about my daughter. It says that she of tainted blood will bring down the most powerful man alive. His love for her will mean his last breath. Thomas believed that the prophecy was about Mione, but he's wrong."

"I just hope it's right, otherwise we're cutting it fine to deal with Thomas." Cammie, like Lucy, was aware that this newly decided plan was probably the last chance to topple Thomas before the opportunity to meld the Four Pillars arose. "But something's puzzling me, why did you agree to marry him in Sydney? I would have thought you'd have chosen here."

"He's afraid for Reg's safety, and with the Australian Minister of Magic being Thomas' go to man down under, he felt that it would be better to do it there." Lucy revealed.

"What?" Cammie gasped as she learned about the Minister.

"Thomas has built up a network of contacts around the globe." Lucy went on. "He's been fostering relationships for years. One of his first ones was with Dumbledore."

"If he was on Thomas' side, then why did Thomas ask you to kill him?" Cammie was a little confused if Dumbledore had been Thomas' ally.

"Dumbledore was getting a little big for his breeches." Lucy had talked to Thomas about it. "He always believed the prophecy I've just

told you about was meant for him. It's the reason why Muggleborns were accepted into Hogwarts. Dumbledore wanted to wipe out the child he believed was destined to bring him down, as he thought that the tainted blood referred to a Muggleborn."

"Instead it referred to a lupine child." Cammie glanced at Lucy's belly. "But why bother bringing Muggleborns to Hogwarts in the first place? Why not just eradicate them?"

"It was a lot less work, and less suspicious, to have most Muggleborns refuse to attend when the situation was explained to them by the Hogwarts staff. Their magic was removed, and so was the threat." Lucy informed her. "Of the ones who took up the opportunity, each of them was interviewed by Dumbledore himself, and their power assessed. None of them were powerful enough to bring Dumbledore down, so he let them finish their schooling. Otherwise I imagine they'd have ended up dead in some sort of accident before their power could become fully fledged."

"I think you did everyone a favor killing him." Cammie hadn't known how deeply Dumbledore's duplicity had gone. "But why did he align himself with Thomas? He must have known how powerful he was."

"Thomas believes he did." Lucy let Cammie into Thomas' thoughts. "And that Dumbledore had just been waiting for the right moment to try and deal with Thomas."

"So Thomas eliminated his competition when he was of no further use to him." Cammie came to the correct assumption.

"You've got it in one." Lucy suddenly heard voices. "Let's talk about clothes."

By the time the two men who Lucy had heard approaching them, reached them, Cammie was waxing lyrical about a Muggle maternity store she'd discovered, and offering to take Lucy to see it.

Drawing up to his wife, Regulus picked up his son out of the stroller. "Come to Daddy." He smiled at Thomas. "Just think, this will be you again shortly."

"I'm looking forward to it." Thomas put his arm around Lucy. "We both are."

Miami Airport - 11th December 2012

They had barely stepped foot inside the airport, when Lucy stopped suddenly. "Sorry, Thomas but I need to use the restroom."

Having gotten used to Lucy's frequent trips since she'd gotten pregnant, Thomas glanced around. "I'll wait by the newsstand over there."

His persual of the newspaper headlines was brought to a swift halt a few minutes later, as he heard Lucy yelling to let go of her, just as she was shoved towards the exit. Breaking into a sprint, Thomas began to race over to her, but Lucy had already been hustled out of the door. As Thomas burst through the doors, he was just in time to see a car driving off at high speed, and disappearing into traffic.

As Lucy's decoy was being driven off, in the ladies' bathroom, an unrecognizable Tonks gave the real Lucy a bag. "Put this dress on. I'm going to check on Seville." Tonks meandered out. She was far quicker coming back in. She tapped on Lucy's door. "Let me in."

Lucy opened the cubicle door, having slid the baggy dress over her clothing. "What is it?"

"There are security guards, police and Seville coming this way. Let me deal with this." Tonks quickly aimed her wand at Lucy. "A quick glamour. I just hope that Seville doesn't notice it." She then also tapped Lucy's passport, before tapping the papers she also had with her.

Lucy caught sight of herself in the mirror as Tonks opened the door, and her mouth dropped open. She quickly shut it. Their exit, as well as everyone else's, was blocked by a large contingent of police and security guards, as well as Thomas who, unable to avoid the attention Lucy's decoy had caused during her kidnapping, was currently having

to co-operate with the police. Lucy ducked her head down, even though there was no way he should recognize her.

The lead police officer stopped Lucy and Tonks, and other officers began to draw the other women in the restroom aside, and began to question them. "A young woman was just abducted from this bathroom. We need to know if you saw anything."

"I do not understand." Tonks thankfully spoke French fluently, courtesy of her father's grandmother.

"Do you speak English?" The police officer asked.

Thomas butted in. "I speak French." He then proceeded to act as interpreter. "Did you see who abducted my fiancée?"

Tonks sounded puzzled. "Do you mean the girl in the black dress?"

"Yes." Thomas clarified Tonks' supposition.

"She was not abducted." Tonks responded lightly. "She was arrested."

"How do you know it was the police?" Thomas asked again, ignoring the police officer who had no idea what was being said.

"The arresting officer had a badge." Tonks lied. "When your fiancée started to struggle, I just assumed that the girl had committed a crime, and that was why she did not wish to go with the female officer and her male colleague."

"Tell her I need to see their passports." The police officer in charge interrupted, trying to take control of the situation back, and Thomas translated.

"I'm not flying, just my ward." Tonks put her arm around Lucy. "Her name is Mai Ling. But she doesn't speak English; only Mandarin, and a little French." She then handed over Lucy's passport. "I believe you'll find everything is in order."

"It is." The police officer handed them back. "But we'll need you both to come and make a statement." Again Thomas translated for both of them.

"She was in the cubicle when it happened, so she didn't see anything." Tonks informed Thomas. "I'm happy to come with you, but Mai Ling has to make this flight."

"Can I see her boarding pass?" The officer wanted to make sure that Mai Ling was above board.

After laboriously waiting for Thomas' translation, Tonks handed it over. "See, everything is totally in order."

Suddenly a male doctor pushing a wheelchair appeared. "Let me through."

Everyone turned around, and the police officer in charge questioned the man's foray into the crowd. "And who are you, Sir?"

"Dr Adam Lambert." The doctor withdrew his passport and papers. "I'm here to escort Mai Ling to the aircraft."

The police officer raised an eyebrow as he read them, and instructed Thomas. "Tell her that someone's a lucky girl."

"Hardly. She's in need of medical intervention. That's why he's here." Tonks responded after Thomas finished translating. Tonks didn't know exactly what was on the papers that the false Doctors had handed over, but she knew it had to be Harry or Remus, and that they'd overheard what was going on, and like her, was acting on the fly. "The charity I work for has arranged this."

The police officer decided that everything was above board. "I'll let her leave then, but I'll need you to come with us to take a look at some shots, as we don't believe that Mr. Seville's fiancée was taken by real police. And we'll need details where we can contact this young lady, in case we need to speak to her again."

Tonks had a few moments breathing space to compile an answer as she waited for Thomas' translation. "Of course. Let me just tell her goodbye."

Tonks hugged Lucy, and whispered as quietly as she could, before finally raising her voice to speak the only two words in Mandarin that she could remember, her knowledge of them a result of teaching a young Chinese girl. "Go with him. Don't worry about me. Good luck."

Lucy sniffled, the tears that were always now close to the surface coming in handy. Picking up the duffle bag that had contained her change of clothes, she sat down in the wheelchair, her heart pounding as she was pushed away. Once they were out of earshot, she asked a question. "Who are you?"

"It's Remus." Remus placed a hand on Lucy's shoulder. "Harry told me to return to make sure that you and Tonks made it out alright. I could hear what was being said and acted accordingly."

"Thanks." Lucy remained silent as they cleared security and Customs, before she was pushed along the airport departure lounge. "I keep imagining he's going to come up behind us."

Remus glanced behind him. "There's no-one coming after us. This exit is us. There's a car waiting at the bottom of the stairs to take us out to the aircraft."

After showing their paperwork to the official who was standing at the door which led to the exit, Remus pushed Lucy to the bottom of the ramp, and then ditched the wheelchair which quickly faded back into a handtowel dispenser as he flicked his wand at it. Then he helped her into the car where he removed their glamours.

After reaching the interior of the aircraft, she and Remus were met by a familiar face. Remus did the introductions. "I don't believe you've met. This is Luna Harris."

Luna hugged Lucy. "Are you alright?"

Remus could feel more genuine concern coming from Luna but didn't put it down to the fact that the two had already met but simply to Luna's mothering nature. "She's just shaken up, but Tonks is going to have to do a little police evasion. I thought Harry would be back by now."

"He probably has to ditch the car." Luna reminded him. "And Tonks will hardly have a problem evading the police."

Suddenly two simultaneous cracks sounded, one noticeably quieter than the other. Lucy broke down when she saw her commanding officer, and Harry strode over, and wrapped his arms around her. "It's over, Lucy."

Lucy now found that she couldn't speak for crying with relief. She didn't even notice Tonks apparating in, having evaded the police as Luna believed she would, and Tonks began briefing Anna on what had happened. Harry led Lucy to sit down. "Let's get you strapped in. The quicker this plane takes off, the better."

Lucy let Harry adjust her belt as if she was a child, her hands shaking far too much to be effective herself. "Thanks."

Harry handed over a calming potion. "This will help."

Lucy downed it, her shaking soon abating. "Sorry, Sir."

"There's nothing to be sorry about." Harry took Lucy's hand in his. "I'm sorry that you were even placed in this mess in the first place."

"It wasn't your fault." Lucy blew her nose on the handkerchief Harry handed to her.

"I think introductions are in order. You've obviously already met Remus and Luna." Harry knew that Lucy wouldn't be aware of Anna's status. "Your doppelganger is Anna Jameson, an undercover operative with BritAD. It's also her we have to thank for this aircraft."

Lucy smiled. "Thank you."

"It's a pleasure." Anna shook Lucy's hand before strapping herself in in the seat behind. "I'm afraid that while this plane is nice it's not quite as opulent as Seville's. My father enjoys his comfort but not to excess."

"I wouldn't care if I was going back in a veal crate." Lucy was just relieved to be going home.

"This is for you." Harry handed over a necklace. "I know you aren't supposed to portkey but it's for emergencies only. The weather isn't exactly forecast to be good, and although flying is statistically supposed to be safe, I'd rather have the option."

"I understand." It wouldn't be Lucy's first choice either, and it wasn't one that would be available to Muggles.

Anna finished speaking to the stewardess, and began a quiet conversation with Remus, who'd sat beside her.

Luna, however, stood up. "I'm afraid I have to get off now. I just wanted to make sure you were alright."

"Thanks, Luna." Lucy hugged the blond girl when she bent over to reach her, and after hugging the others as well, Luna vanished. Lucy then grabbed the seat tightly as the plane began to taxi up the runway. "Let's hope the weather favors us. My stomach isn't exactly at it's best."

"Sick bags are to your right." Harry also fished a vial out of his pocket. "Mione also said to give this to you. As you're pregnant, she said no more than half a vial."

"Thank you, Sir." Lucy slipped it into her pocket. "So I expect you want to know whatever I can tell you."

"I do, Lucy." Harry withdrew a Muggle pen. "Fire away."

Lucy began to tell Harry everything useful she could think of, taking her mind off what was going to be a long and very bumpy flight.

San Francisco

Two Days Later

Luna hummed quietly to herself as she hurried in front of Cammie to get the apple pie out of the oven. Xander and Regulus were playing pool in the games room, one floor below them. As Luna entered the kitchen, she went white as she realized who was in there, his back to her, and, unlike the church where other people could have been at risk, this time there was no-one. Almost without thinking, Luna's wand flew into her hand, and she began to utter a curse she'd never expected to use. "Avada..."

Thomas began to turn as he heard the first word of the killing curse, just in time to see Cammie smash into Luna, knocking her to the floor.

"Cammie, what the hell are you doing?" Luna snarled as she got to her feet. "He killed Harry."

Thomas turned completely around, revealing that he had Bella in his arms. "I'll give you top marks for bravery, but not much for brains. What Cammie spotted and you didn't, is that I'm holding my daughter."

Luna closed her eyes as she realized how close she could have come to killing the little girl, and she automatically apologized, but it was meant for Bella, and not Thomas. "I'm sorry. I just saw red. I've never done that before."

Cammie stepped in front of Luna, not trusting Thomas not to retaliate, and her voice was authoritative and urgent. "Luna, get Xander and go. I'll be in touch. Go now."

Deciding to retreat, Luna vanished. Cammie faced her Uncle. "What do you want?"

Thomas wasn't surprised by Cammie's open hostility towards him; she'd been the same way the previous time he visited. "I have some business to discuss with Reg. Maddie went down to the basement to get him. I'd have gone myself but Bella wanted a drink."

The sound of Maddie babbling to her husband, let Cammie know that Regulus was now aware that Thomas was there, and she decided to take on the care of the two girls, wanting Thomas gone as quickly as possible. "Give me Bella." Cammie held out her hands. "Come here, sweetie."

The little girl was quiet, frightened at what had just happened, and clung tighter to Thomas. "No."

"She can stay with me." Thomas held out his hand to Regulus as Regulus came through the door. "Hi, Reg. I have some things I need to discuss with you."

"What just happened?" Right before Maddie had opened the door to the games room, Luna had appeared, grabbed Xander and vanished without a word.

"Thomas will explain." Cammie turned her attention to Maddie. "I've made apple pie. Would you like some with ice-cream?"

Maddie turned to her father. "May I, Dad?"

"You may. There's a glass of milk on the side." Picking up the second cup of milk, this one in a plastic cup, Thomas followed Regulus out and into his study, Bella clinging tightly to him.

Cammie sat Maddie down, and shakily cut the freshly baked pie. "I should have really waited until it's cold to cut it, so be careful you don't burn your tongue."

"I will, Aunt Cammie." Thomas didn't have a problem with Maddie knowing about Cammie, as he intended to obliterate those memories when he'd finished, but his business with Reg couldn't wait and it was the nanny's day off.

Cammie plated the pie and served it. "I just need to make a phone call."

Maddie was more interested in the pie and ice-cream than her aunt's phone calls, so she just shrugged. "kay."

Cammie hurried upstairs and checked on Sam, who was asleep in his crib. After kissing him, she flipped open her cell phone. When Luna answered, she apologized. "I'm so sorry, Luna. I had no idea he'd come here."

"I'm the one who should be apologizing." Luna felt terrible that she hadn't spotted the little girl. "I nearly killed Bella. How did you know she was there?"

"I saw the foot of her teddy bear sticking out." Cammie explained what she'd seen. "If I hadn't, I'd have let you finish the job."

"I should have guessed something would go wrong." Luna was shaken by what she'd done, but Xander's arms around her waist, and the feel of his chest against her back, were helping to calm her down. "I'm not the one prophesied to bring him down, but it would have been nice, and oh so, satisfying."

"That's not like you." Cammie had never known her friend speak like that.

"He killed my friends, and for once the peacekeeper in me wanted war." Luna explained her reasoning. "You'd better go. Meet me for lunch tomorrow at our usual place. I'm only working in the morning. Take care."

"You too." Cammie hung up, checked on Sam again and returned downstairs.

In Regulus' study, Thomas cradled his youngest daughter on his lap, and handed over a newspaper to Reg. "The Manchester Chronicle. Sebastian has made sure I'll know what's going to happen to Lucy."

"Want Luce." Bella reacted at hearing the young woman's name.

"She's not here, Bella." Thomas kissed Bella's head. "But you'll see her soon."

Regulus scanned the notice. "A public execution?"

"He's luring me in." Thomas knew what it was. "What I don't understand is how the hell he knew I was going to be leaving with Lucy on that date. You and Cammie knew; is there any chance she would have told anyone?"

"She wouldn't have said anything." Regulus defended his wife. "Cammie likes Lucy, and she knows that not only would Lucy's life be forfeit if she was caught because of what she is, but her daughter's as well. She just wouldn't do it."

Thomas had to admit that Regulus was right. "How about her little friends, the one of whom just tried to kill me."

"What?" Regulus was stunned.

Thomas told him briefly what had happened. "So do you think Cammie would have said anything to Luna?"

"No." Regulus shook his head. "Again, she'd have known that it could have led to where it's going to now."

"Then I have another leak somewhere." Thomas rubbed his chin. "But I don't have time to search now. Her execution is set for tomorrow."

"You're going to get her back?" Regulus questioned Thomas' actions.

"Did you expect me to do anything else?" Thomas countered his friend's question.

"Are you doing this for Lucy or the baby?" Regulus still wasn't sure of how Thomas felt about Lucy, even though Thomas was intending to marry her, as Thomas had shrugged off his question the last time they'd met.

"Both." Thomas was a little more open this time. "I'm doing it because I love them both."

"She must be doing something right if she's managed to usurp Mione in your affections." Regulus picked up Bella's teddy bear as she dropped it.

"She hasn't." Thomas denied. "I love Lucy but not like I love Mione, and yes, I do still love her. I think I always will, even though I don't want to."

Regulus understood entirely. "I feel the same way about Cam. But I am glad that you've managed to move past her."

"With that in mind, I have some papers I need you to draw up." Thomas pulled out a sheet from his pocket. "And I need them today."

Regulus glanced over the sheet, and looked sharply up. "You don't think you're going to succeed, do you?"

"I do but I have to be pragmatic. If I don't make it back, I have a company to protect for my children." Thomas by now had reassigned new meaning to the prophecy relating to the one of tainted blood, and, like Lucy, now believed that it applied to his unborn daughter. "And if I don't make these changes, and something happens, then Alex would take over the company until Maddie is old enough to assume responsibility, and we both know how disastrous that would be."

"I'll get straight onto it." Regulus opened up his laptop, and waited for it to boot up. "I can access all the original documents through the main server, but you'll have to have two witnesses to sign everything."

"I'll ask two of my staff to do it." Thomas didn't care who the witnesses were, as long as he got them. "How long will it take?"

"Less than an hour." Regulus patted his printer. "This baby prints off at speeds you wouldn't believe."

Thomas smiled. "You've really embraced your Muggle lifestyle, haven't you?"

"What other choice do I have?" Regulus typed in his password to gain access to the company server. "And don't even bring up the Corpus option."

"In that case, none." Thomas watched as Regulus efficiently downloaded everything he needed, and then began to make the necessary changes Thomas had asked for. When it was done, he slipped the papers into a folder, and took them from Regulus. "I'll ask Janice to make the necessary copies."

"Be careful." Regulus held out his hand to Thomas.

"I'll bring her back." Thomas then let himself out of the study, and headed upstairs to collect his daughter.

Next Chapter: Thomas leads an attack to take back what is his. Harry takes Thomas on for their final confrontation.

Chapter 85: The Final Confrontation

12th December 2012

Vettriano Place, 5am

Cassandra lay in Harry's arms. "I'm so afraid, Harry."

"It's going to be alright." Harry kissed her forehead, Cassandra's hair all sweaty from where they'd just made love. "He won't beat me this time."

"How can you be sure?" Cassandra was terrified.

"I can't be. Not totally." Harry couldn't lie to her. "But I'm stronger, more prepared, more ready than I've ever been."

"I can't be there." Cassandra wanted to support her husband, but the thought that she'd have to see him die was more than she could bear. "It was bad enough saying goodbye to Harry when I did, without having to do the same to you as well."

Harry had seen Cassandra's memory of the event. "He didn't want to live without Cammie, Cass. As I told James, he just wanted to be free of the pain."

"You understand that, don't you?" Cassandra asked softly.

"Only too well." Harry could feel Cassandra's own pain about Harry Potter as she asked. "Going through losing Mione was awful, but when I thought I'd lost you when Thomas took you, that was so much worse. However, at least I knew I was going to get you back, and it's all because of Harry."

"Did you really want to punch him like you told him that night in Hogwarts?" Cassandra sat up, and looked down at her husband. "For kissing me?"

"Yes." Harry smiled. "And I wasn't exactly thrilled you kissed him, but I understand what it was for."

"It was just my way of saying thank you, and goodbye." Cassandra fought against her tears. "What if Seville does to you, what he did to Harry?"

"He won't. I'm going to beat him this time, Cass." Harry gently coaxed Cassandra back down so that she was lying on top of him. "Because if I don't then there will be nothing to stop him; H.J. certainly can't."

On top of his recent injury, H.J.'s overuse of a field dressing enabling him to walk again had now caused his leg to deteriorate even faster, necessitating the use of a cane on a permanent basis.

"Then I trust you to do it." Cassandra lowered her head, and kissed Harry, words fading into insignificance, as they began to make love yet again.

10am – BritAD, Manchester

Harry checked his watch. "Are you ready for this?"

"Yes." Anna swallowed the potion and changed. "Can I have the salve?"

Harry handed over the salve that Severus and Mione had worked together to come up with in such a short space of time. "Make sure that you cover your wrists well and particularly your neck. If you miss a spot, the silver will burn." Despite the fact that Anna wasn't a werewolf, her inherited abilities still meant that coming into contact with silver was painful for her, and as the silver chains would be tested, they couldn't fake this part.

"I feel guilty." Lucy knelt down and dealt with Anna's ankles. "It should be me doing this."

"It's my job now, and you're pregnant." Anna spoke in a matter of fact voice. "And it's not as if Seville will hurt me, especially not while he thinks I'm you."

"It still doesn't make me feel any better." Lucy got to her feet. "Anna, the people out there will treat you like scum. They believe you're a murderer, and a werewolf."

"I just want you to know that I'd never allow a werewolf to be treated like this under normal circumstances." Harry could feel Lucy's disgust. "They would be tried and dealt with like any other wizard."

"I know, Sir." Lucy was glad of his reassurance though. "It's just that dragging someone through the streets, and then executing them in a public display is so barbaric."

"I agree." Harry patted Lucy's shoulder. "Now you'll be staying here until it's all over."

Harry pulled a cloth mask over Anna's head to hide her face. Lucy frowned. "Why the mask, Sir?"

"This is known as the mask of shame." Harry tightened the straps around Anna's head. "Legend has it that it was supposed to prevent children seeing the face of the werewolf being executed, so that it couldn't turn them by exposure. All an old wife's tale of course, but this still remains as part of the procedure; something that after today I hope will be phased out. I've already placed a bill with Sirius that I want the Wizing Council to consider."

The Wizing Council was the new body that had been set up after the slaughter of most of the members of the Wizengamot by Thomas. It consisted of forty senior wizards, including those members of the Wizengamot who'd been rescued from the Great Hall along with the pupils and staff of Hogwarts.

Harry pulled Anna to her feet. "Are you ready?"

"Yes." Anna assured him, and she was then led out of the room where her preparation had taken place, to begin the walk to the arena where the execution would purportedly take place. Her journey along the streets of the wizing community of Manchester was one she'd remember for the rest of her life. She'd known of people's fear and hatred of werewolves, but the vile words, and items thrown at her,

proved it went deeper than most people believed. She was just glad that only the words could get through, a shield protecting her and her guards from everything else. And she had the feeling that Harry's hoped for bill might not make it to the approval stage.

Harry, as head of BritAD, led the way into the large arena that had been taken over for the day. The witnesses to the event shuffled in behind Anna and her guards. Once Anna had been dragged up onto the large wooden dais, usually used for putting on plays and the like, Harry turned to order the doors to be closed, Aurors ringing the entire seating section, when his men suddenly all withdrew their wands. "Hold your fire." Harry subsequently addressed the individual who had just walked in. "Dominus, how wonderful to see you."

"You knew I'd be here." Thomas stepped into the amphitheater, his men streaming in behind him. "I'm afraid your men outside didn't make it. That was rather foolhardy of you to leave a guard outside, knowing I'd be coming."

"It would have been if they'd been my men. But they were taken from the prisoners we took at Hogwarts." Harry retorted. "And, as they'd been formally tried, and had all been sentenced to death, I thought I'd use the Imperious curse on them, so they'd act as my men. You saved me the trouble of executing them, but if you'd spared them, then so would I have."

"Clever." Thomas turned to his own men, who also had their own wands out and were eyeing up the many Aurors inside the arena. "You will also hold your fire until I tell you otherwise."

An uneasy standoff began, Death Eaters and Aurors mingling, as each moved to mark one another. Harry called out. "If anyone wants to leave, then I suggest they do so now." When no-one did, Harry ordered the doors closed.

Thomas eyed up the crowd. "These aren't ordinary bystanders, are they?"

"No." Harry again acknowledged Thomas' words. "They're Destin's men." Destin smirked at Thomas. "Hello, Dominus."

"You'll be dead before you leave here." Thomas warned the Frenchman.

"In your dreams, Dominus." Destin then turned and addressed his own people. "You can draw your wands but do not open fire."

"So what are we going to do, Harry?" Thomas questioned Harry. "You could execute my apprentice there, and this would descend into a bloodbath; one I'd be walking out of." Thomas began to walk over to the dais, only for Aurors to bar his way.

Harry barked out an order. "Let him through, and do not open fire unless I tell you to."

The Aurors parted, and Thomas climbed the steps until he was facing Harry, and the woman he believed was Lucy. "Take off her mask."

Harry gave an order to Destin, who was standing behind him. "Take it off."

Anna was glad to have the mask off, her face tear-drenched from the tears she'd shed along the walk under the continual barrage of abuse. Thomas didn't approach her, but asked gently. "Are you okay?"

"They're about to execute me; how do you think I am?" Anna had reviewed certain of Lucy's memories, and knew how Lucy would have reacted.

Thomas had expected her to bite his head off. "Point taken. Don't worry, I will get you out of this."

"You'd better." Anna snapped. "You said that I'd never have to go through this."

"And I'll keep that promise." Thomas turned his attention back to Harry. "So what do you suggest instead of unleashing our forces on each other? We both lost far too many people at Hogwarts, so perhaps an alternative solution would be a good idea."

"Well, we could take tea and discuss it like civilized human beings, but somehow I can't see that happening." Harry's tone was nonchalant. "So the only obvious solution would be for us to duel. So, Dominus, if you can take me on in a duel, and beat me, then I give you my word that I will let you leave unharmed."

"If I agree, I want Lucy released, no matter what the outcome." Thomas intended that Lucy and his unborn daughter would walk free. "We both know she isn't the one you want."

"I'll agree to it, if you give me your word that you and your men will let my Aurors here leave unharmed should I fail, and that includes Destin and his men. And if I win, your men will voluntarily hand over their weapons, and submit to arrest." Harry set out his conditions. "Are my terms acceptable?"

"Absolutely." Thomas took off his cloak, as he answered for his forces as Harry had just done for his own and Destin's men. "You have my word. Pureblood rules apply?"

Cassandra, who'd changed her mind about not attending, grabbed Harry's arm. "Please, Harry. Don't do this."

"I have to." Harry kissed his wife swiftly, and turned back to Thomas. "Pureblood rules apply."

He turned to the Death Eater and Auror audience. "For those of you who aren't clear what this means, I'll tell you. If you attempt to interfere in this duel, you will die. And, if I should be so unlucky as to lose, and any Death Eater attempts to harm any person here, they will die for going against Dominus' word. And if I win, and a Death Eater fails to surrender to my men, they will also perish. I now suggest that everyone erects the strongest shield they can; I don't want stray spells to harm any of you."

Everyone moved back, and did as Harry suggested. Only then did Harry take his place opposite Thomas, a smile playing across his lips. "We could get down to the nitty gritty and start with the killing curse, but let's make it more interesting. There will be no apparition, and we should both agree not to use the killing curse, or any other directly

lethal curse. Obviously if you get me to yield, then you may choose to use whichever spell you deem suitable, lethal or otherwise."

"You think you can beat me that way?" Thomas withdrew his wands as he asked.

"If you don't think you can, then we can just get down to it." Harry taunted Thomas, as he was banking on Thomas agreeing to his challenge, as he knew that he'd be unable to beat Thomas by simply going head to head if they were using lethal spells.

Thomas shrugged. "I will beat you no matter what, so I accept your first option."

The two men bowed, and a game of cat and mouse began.

"Let's start simply." Harry gave Thomas a heads up that he was going to open fire. "Expelliarmus."

As he avoided the spell, Thomas smiled behind his mask, acknowledging that they were going to build up slowly, both men savoring this final confrontation. "Stupefy."

Harry too, avoided the spell. "Contego Aqua."

A wall of water flew towards Thomas, and he dispelled it, and the bone breaking curse that also came his way. "My turn. Sextum Dexterā."

Harry shielded against the spell that would have sliced off his wand hand. "Aduro Induviae."

Thomas stopped Harry's spell that would have set fire to his clothing, and aimed his wand into the air, conjuring up a thunderstorm.

As Harry avoided a bolt of lightning, Thomas aimed at Harry's feet. "Cavus."

Harry wasn't quick enough to avoid the chasm that opened under him, and he dropped into the pit which appeared in the wooden dais.

Intending to leap out, his intentions floundered as he suddenly found himself inundated under water. Swimming to the surface, he reappeared just as Thomas turned the water into ice. Harry was lucky his wand hand was free as he aimed his wand at the ice. "Comminuo."

The ice shattered, sending shards spraying over both men, razor sharp slivers ripping into both of their skins. Harry used the momentary distraction to get back to his feet, and sent a blasting spell at Thomas with all the power he possessed.

Thomas shielded and did the same back, forcing Harry to step backwards.

Harry then created a darkness spell as he had done at USAD, and then proceeded to suck the air out of it. Having seen it before, Thomas dispelled it, but not before he landed on his back, thousands of small metal ballbearings having suddenly appeared out of nowhere, and forcing him to lose his balance as he stepped on several of them.

Harry threw a flesh stripping spell at Thomas when he went down, his quarry crying out in pain. "That one stings doesn't it?"

"Not as much as this." Thomas sent thousands of tiny darts at Harry, using the threefold spell to triple its effect.

Harry had to fight to hold back the darts, his breath coming in rapid spurts as the effort began to tell on him. He returned the compliment with a snowstorm, small deadly pieces of hail embedded in its center, and, just like Thomas had, Harry used the threefold spell to magnify its effect.

Now it was Thomas's turn to fight to deal with a spell, as Harry also sent a blasting curse straight at him.

Dealing with everything Harry had thrown at him, Thomas regained his footing, his shoulder smarting where his flesh had peeled back. "It's time to end this." He conjured up a powerful wind, the rotation catching Harry up in it, carrying him higher and higher towards the ceiling. Harry dispelled it, and hurtled back down towards the ground,

trying to ignore his wife's gasp of horror, as he cast a cushioning charm.

As he landed, he was blasted by a concussion spell, and he flew backwards, his head smashing against a wooden post, the force splitting it in two. Dazed, he found himself coming under continual bombardment as Thomas sent blasting spell after blasting spell at him until Harry's shield finally collapsed.

Thomas then used the threefold spell twice on Harry in quick succession, and six deadly silver knives flew through the air towards Harry, none aimed at anywhere that would be immediately lethal as they'd agreed at the start of the duel. Harry managed to avoid the first three, but the four and fifth ones buried themselves deep into Harry's shoulder and chest, and the sixth into the depths of his stomach.

"Harry!" Cassandra screamed, but was stopped from rushing forward by Destin, who grabbed her around the waist and held her back.

Harry doubled up, and he collapsed to his knees, his wand dropping out of his hand, and flying into Thomas' own. Thomas then disarmed Harry, Harry's knife and secondary wand being forcibly ripped off him, before Thomas walked over and behind Harry.

Harry screamed out as yet another blade was driven deep into his back. Thomas placed his wand at Harry's neck. "Do you yield, Sebastian?"

Gasping for breath, Harry struggled hard to control the molten mass of pain that had invaded his body, the silver in the knives causing far more pain to him than a normal knife would have done. The one in his back, he knew had been doctored with silver nitrate. "Go to hell."

"You should have known you'd never win, Sebastian." Thomas drove yet another knife into Harry's back, making him scream out, and Cassandra sobbed helplessly in Destin's arms. "Yield."

Harry said nothing, and gathering his strength, he wrapped his hands around the silver knife in his stomach, ignoring the sensation as the silver handle burnt an imprint into his palms. Not giving Thomas any

idea of what he was about to do, Harry remained doubled over, as if unable to do anything.

"You've fought well, but it's over, Sebastian. Now yield." Thomas demanded.

As Thomas walked around him, Harry made his move, yanking the knife out of his stomach and swiftly swinging around. "Fuck you."

As Harry used all of his strength to drive the knife into Thomas' thigh piercing both flesh and bone, Thomas instinctively reached down to grab for the knife. When he did, Harry punched him in the face as hard as he possibly could, screaming in pain as the bones in his fingers shattered on impact upon the solid golden mask, but the punch had still contained enough force to send Thomas staggering backwards on his injured leg, his arms flailing as he struggled to stay upright. Ignoring the pain in his body, Harry was moving even as Thomas fell, his uninjured hand reaching out and grabbing Thomas' wand as he fell. "Stupefy."

Thomas' fight to stay upright ended as the spell took hold, and his head ricocheted against the wooden floor with a crack that made more than one person flinch. After pulling the knives in his shoulder and chest out; the ones in his back having to remain there until the duel was over as he couldn't accept help until then, Harry aimed the wand at his damaged hand. Harry hissed when pain ripped through the hand as the bones became held rigid when the field dressing became effective. He then aimed the wand at Thomas. "Incarcerous." Finally he enervated him. "Do you yield?"

"No." Thomas refused, struggling against the ropes around him.

"Okay." Harry's voice was pleasant and light, even though he wanted to do nothing more than roll over and scream with the pain that was almost overwhelming him. "What shall I try next? I know."

As Harry withdrew a vial from his jacket, a Death Eater withdrew his wand, the words of the killing curse being spewed forth. He was dead before the last syllable left his lips.

Harry turned slowly around, his injuries making it difficult for him to function. "I warned you all. Until Dominus surrenders and you yield your weapons to my men, pureblood rules apply. So if you don't want to end up like your colleague there, I suggest you co-operate."

One of the Death Eaters asked Harry a question. "How do we know you won't just kill us anyway?"

"I give you my word that I will review each of your cases, and assign my recommendation for sentencing after that." Harry promised, keeping his eye on Thomas as he asked.

"What if we didn't want to join?" A woman, who had been forced by her husband to join to help make up the numbers that Thomas had lost during the Hogwarts massacre, called out.

"Then I will be more lenient. But first, I have something I need to finish." He knelt down beside Thomas, his legs shaking. "You are going to yield, and I don't care how long I have to do this until you do."

"Keep trying." Thomas taunted Harry. "And my lawyers will tie you up in knots for months over torturing a prisoner, or you'll hopefully bleed to death."

"We're dueling under pureblood rules, and I can do whatever I want to you as long as it isn't immediately lethal, and trust me, I won't bleed to death." Silently saying a prayer in the hope that he wouldn't bleed out before Thomas yielded, Harry placed the vial on the floor. He then placed the wand between his teeth, and picked up one of the knives he'd pulled out of his body with his left hand, before removing the wand with his injured hand in order to speak. "But you're right about one thing, your lawyers will argue this in your favor, and they're welcome to, but they won't win. And I'm willing to wait as long as necessary to see you die, and believe me, Dominus, you're going to die. But first you're going to yield."

Thomas gritted his teeth as Harry slashed four one inch gashes across his chest. "What is that?"

"Obviously I can't use silver nitrate on you as you did on Harry Potter." Harry let Thomas know he was doing this for revenge for Harry Potter's death. "But I can use acid."

Thomas' screams set Cassandra's teeth on edge as she watched Harry drop several drops of acid into each cut, and she had to look away as Thomas yelled out at Harry. "For fuck's sake, stop."

"Do you yield?" Harry kept his voice hard, resisting the urge to cry as the pain from the silver nitrate was now starting to overpower him.

"No." Thomas snarled, trying to use anger to overcome the pain.

"Then, let's try something else." Harry used his wand to force Thomas' head back, so that his throat would open naturally, and placing the wand between his teeth again, took out a second vial. Taking the wand in his stiff right hand yet again, he spoke to Thomas. "This vial contains a poison; it won't kill you but you'll wish it had. Its effects won't be as severe as the silver nitrate you inflicted on my friend, but it's as close as it gets."

"You'll bleed to death before I yield." Thomas refused to give in.

"Goodie." Harry uncorked the vial with his teeth. "I was hoping you'd say that."

Thomas' body began to contort within moments of the poison slipping down his throat, and his screams echoed around the amphitheater. Harry watched as Thomas had with Harry Potter, completely unmoved by the man's agony. Realizing that it wouldn't be long before he passed out himself, Harry asked Thomas the same question he had after he'd used the acid on him. "Do you yield?"

Thomas couldn't speak for screaming, and Harry sighed and pulled out another vial, dropping its contents into Thomas' mouth, just about getting some in as the man thrashed around. As the antidote took effect, Harry prodded Thomas' chest with the wand in his hand. "Do you yield, or shall we do that again?"

Unable to bear such pain again, Thomas finally admitted defeat. "I yield."

"Pity." Harry re-corked the vial of poison, grimacing at the discomfort in his right hand as he did so. "I would have enjoyed seeing you scream like that again."

Cassandra ran across the dais, and uncaring about blood, and not realizing how badly her husband was injured, threw herself into Harry's arms, knocking him to the floor. "I thought I'd lost you."

"I told you I'd win." Harry didn't care who was watching, and kissed Cassandra as she lay alongside him, a few hoots and cat calls coming from both Death Eaters and Aurors alike. Harry then released his wife, who helped him to his feet so that he could address the audience. "You will surrender your weapons and masks to my Aurors, and then kneel with your hands behind your head. Afterwards you will be taken to a processing center where you will be questioned. I will then review each and every case, and my recommendation for sentencing. If you resist, then as per Dominus' pureblood oath, you will die."

Harry turned to Anna and Destin. "Take him in." He then collapsed unconscious, a pool of blood around him, evidence of his worsening condition. Cassandra acted swiftly, and immediately portkeyed them both to St. Mungo's, leaving Destin and Anna to deal with the aftermath.

Destin added further bonds to Harry's original ones, wanting to ensure that Thomas firmly secured, and checked him for further weapons. And, all around the arena, not wishing to die, the Death Eaters did as Harry had instructed, and dropped to their knees. Up on stage, after securing Thomas, Destin then removed Anna's restraints, his gloves protecting him from contacting the silver. "He's all yours, Ma'am."

"Thank you, Destin." Anna smiled at him.

Thomas noted how friendly Anna and Destin were. "What the fuck is going on?"

"You don't really think Commander Sebastian would subject a pregnant woman to something as barbaric as this, do you? This entire execution was just bait." Anna easily hauled Thomas to his feet. "I'm one of his operatives. Viking will be held under house arrest until she gives birth, and then she will be released as Commander Sebastian agreed."

"And what will happen to the baby?" Thomas realized how stupid he'd been with his demand.

"She'll be separated from her mother, and placed into an orphanage." Anna lied, knowing how much it would irk Thomas. "And never told about her unfortunate parentage."

"You can't do that to her." Thomas began to struggle, but Anna easily subdued him.

"We can do whatever we want to Dominus." Destin smirked. "You see, you're no longer king of the world."

"Fuck you, you half..." Thomas' words came to an abrupt end as Anna silenced him.

Destin thanked her. "Thanks, it was beginning to get a little too much."

The Next Day

Having already been interviewed that morning at BritAD by Harry, who'd quickly recovered after treatment, Thomas now paced up and down in the cell that he'd been transferred to in New Azkaban. He scowled as Harry entered the room, the glass partition separating them. "What do you want now?"

Harry looked around the room. "Not quite the palatial conditions you're used to, are they?" Harry took a wand out of his pocket and slid it into the receiving box, and pushed it through. "This is for you."

"You're giving me a wand?" Thomas took the wand on his side.

"It's just a basic training wand." Harry informed him. "All prisoners have one. It will perform low level spells so that you can operate the showerhead in the wall behind you, vanish your waste, reheat your food, keep yourself clean, change your mask so that you can eat." Thomas had refused to remove it. "But if you don't believe that that's all its for, then try it."

Thomas aimed it at the wall. "Reducto." Absolutely nothing happened.

"Try a low level spell." Harry suggested.

"Lumos." Thomas tried a lighting spell, and a weak light appeared at the end of the wand. "Hardly spectacular is it?"

"It's not mean to be." Harry sat down on the chair that was on his side of the partition. "Your trial has been set for a week's time, and just so you know up front, I'll be requesting the death penalty for you. Your lawyers have already no doubt started working frantically on your behalf, but I've put Cassandra and our prosecutors to work on my side. They're going to construct an airtight argument, and no matter how long it takes, we will succeed."

"How will you do it if you get the death penalty?" Thomas wondered if they were going to walk him into the archway again.

Harry was taking no such chances. "Killing curse. I want to make sure that there's absolutely no possibility of you wreaking the same sort of havoc you have here somewhere else. I don't trust the Fates, and I want to make sure it's done properly this time."

"And who will carry out the sentence?" Thomas asked.

"I will." Harry, as head of BritAD had that responsibility. "But don't think that aren't others who wouldn't happily execute you if for some reason I can't, because there are."

"First you have to get the death penalty applied." Thomas put a great deal of faith in his lawyers' abilities.

"I'll get it." Harry got up. "Now until your trial, this will be the last time I'll be seeing you. But before I go, I want you to think about what's going to happen to you when I come here to carry out the sentence I intend to get. Consider what it's going to be like when you have to kneel in front of me, the floor hard and unyielding beneath your knees. Then think about when you feel the cold, smooth tip of my wand against your neck. Because at that instant you will have just moments left to live, Seville. But most of all, I want you to contemplate the gut-wrenching, all encompassing fear you'll experience as I start to say the words that will silence you forever. Then just before it's all over, maybe, just maybe, I'll hesitate, and you'll believe that perhaps I can't do it."

Harry smiled a sadistically cold smile. "But believe me I can, and I will. I just want you to think about what your victims went through before they died, as I believe you should get to suffer a little of what they did."

"You don't frighten me." Thomas lied as his stomach had indeed begun to knot up at Harry's words.

"We'll see." Harry then walked out of the cell.

Two Doors Down

Remus stood in front of the glass partition, having just explained about the wand to Rupert. "What did I ever do to you to make you turn to him?"

"You were born." Rupert's voice was filled with hatred.

"You didn't always hate me." Remus would have known. "I would have been able to tell."

"No, I didn't." Rupert had to admit to the truth. "But that changed when you started to do so well at school. Father was so proud of you; the half-breed who'd overcome all challenges and rose above them. No matter what I did, it wasn't good enough."

"Is that why you started practicing Muggle witchcraft?" Remus had long known about Rupert's dabbling.

"Yes." Rupert admitted. "I thought I could be like you; that Father would see me differently. Instead I got my friend killed, and I decided to give up on it."

"Until Thomas came along." Remus conjectured.

"He offered me what I'd always desired; a way to be better than you." Rupert thought back to what he'd done. "And I don't regret it."

"You don't regret killing?" Remus was aware that Rupert wouldn't have been able to avoid the first kill agenda.

"No." Rupert shook his head. "It was a small price to pay for what I gained."

"You disgust me." Remus had hoped that Rupert would show some remorse. "You're no longer the person I once thought I knew."

"You knew a false me; I was never that tea-drinking, oh so genial person everyone thought I was." Rupert sneered. "I was so much more."

Remus was saddened by his brother's attitude. "You should have come to me. I would have helped you."

"I didn't want your help." Rupert immediately disparaged Remus' words. "And you would never have given me what I wanted."

"No, I wouldn't." Remus admitted. "But I would have tried to do something for you."

"Remus, just take your bleeding heart attitude and go." Rupert didn't want to listen to Remus' platitudes.

"Before I go, you should know that Harry's requesting the death penalty for you." Remus warned his brother.

Rupert wasn't entirely surprised by the news. "And who will carry it out, you?"

"I could never do that. Even with what you've done, you're still my brother." Remus hated what Rupert had done but he could still never do that to Rupert. "Harry has the responsibility all to himself."

"I knew you wouldn't have the balls." Rupert felt like crying, and attacked Remus instead. "So just fuck off, and leave me be." Rupert then turned his back on Remus, terminating their final discussion.

Next Chapter: Lucy makes a decision about her future; Luna makes her feelings about the new woman in H.J.'s life very clear; Thomas' sentence is announced.

Chapter 86: The Sentence

July 12th 2013

Harry collapsed onto the sofa in Sirius' office. "I have to be honest. I was almost afraid that his lawyers were going to beat us. I know he threatened to tie things up for months, but I really didn't expect it would take this long."

"Neither did we. But at least we had Cassie on the case." Sirius had been proud of how his daughter had handled the matter. "I expect you're pleased that Cassie has decided to switch to the defense side of BritAD."

"You've no idea." Harry had supported his wife when, after Harry had refused pointblank to let her return to active duty, she'd begun to take the next steps to become a lawyer, building on the basic law qualifications she already possessed as an Auror. "I may as well tell you that we've eased up on the adoption idea as well while she's doing the training. To be truthful, Cass isn't ready yet to give up on our having a child of our own."

The two Muggle fertilization attempts they'd made, the most recent one in June, had so far failed but Cassandra and Harry had agreed to try again once she gained her full wizarding law degree, which would be about 12 months off.

"You've got my support no matter what you do." Sirius promised, and got back to the subject of Thomas. "When are you going to carry out the sentence?"

"Tomorrow." Harry closed his eyes. "I can't say I'm looking forward to it."

"You could still walk him through the Propylaeum." Sirius suggested, both BritAD and the Ministry now back in their former locations, Harry having had to use blood from Maddie in order for him and Anna to break down the wards on Hogwarts and the Ministry.

"I can't." Harry ran a hand over the back of his neck. "It has to be this way. We can't afford to take the chance that he'll somehow survive it if we execute him that way. It's why I used the killing curse on the remaining Inner Circle, and their apprentices.

Of all the other Death Eaters who'd been sentenced to death, only four, Rupert, Lucius, Cedric and Blaise had actually been executed by the killing curse; the remaining thirty-six who Harry had deemed worthy of the death penalty had been pushed through the Propylaeum. Narcissa Malfoy and Ginny Zabini had both been sentenced to life in New Azkaban and stripped of their magic, as had many of the other Death Eaters. But as Harry had promised, those forced into Thomas' service, had either been pardoned or given a light sentence; the woman from the amphitheater receiving a full pardon. Lucy had also received a full pardon, and a public apology clearing her name, together with a First Class Merlin with honors; Lucy's appearance during a night of a full moon had caused all rumors about her being a werewolf to die down. Also all the Aurors that had died had received Third Class Merlins, Neville Longbottom a Second Class, and Harry Potter a First Class Merlin with honors. Sirius had refused to award one to Orion, not wanting to show favoritism, even after what Orion had done.

Harry got to his feet. "I'd better get on. Seville isn't my only concern."

"I'll see you at dinner tonight." Sirius picked up his quill. "And don't be late unless you want Faith to take you to task."

"I'll be there." Harry promised, and let himself out of the office.

The Next Day

Harry stood outside of Thomas' cell. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Yes." Lucy nodded, her stomach churning. "Open the door."

Harry unlocked the door, and followed Lucy inside. "You have a visitor, Seville."

"Lucy, are you alright?" Thomas was still enclosed behind a thick glass panel, enabling those outside to look in, but stopping Thomas from accessing them.

"I'm fine." Lucy sat down as Harry pulled out the chair that was on their side of the glass partition. "Thank you, Sir."

"Sir?" Thomas questioned Lucy's deference towards Harry.

"He's my commanding officer, Thomas." Lucy was glad she was sitting down as her legs were shaking almost uncontrollably. "And I owe him my respect as well as my loyalty."

Thomas knew in that moment who the leak he'd suspected had been. "You played me."

"Every last moment of every second we were together." Lucy confirmed. "You were just a job."

"You were good, Lucy. I'll give you that." Thomas' face became a cold mask to hide his true feelings. "Even going so far as to get pregnant with my child to entrap me. Now that really was going above and beyond the call of duty."

"My daughter wasn't planned." Lucy had given birth three weeks' earlier to a six pound girl. "I would never use her in such a disgusting manner."

"But you still used her as bait." Thomas came up to the glass. "She's the reason I came after you."

"I'm well aware of why you did." Lucy's gaze didn't waver as she met Thomas' eyes. "Do you remember the prophecy, Thomas?"

"Of course I do." Thomas smiled wryly. "My daughter is the one of tainted blood, and it was my love for her that was my downfall."

"You're almost correct." Lucy then dropped a bombshell on Thomas. "But it wasn't your daughter you gave yourself up for."

"You're lying." Thomas refuted Lucy's claim. "There's no way she's someone else's daughter."

"Do you remember the first time we had sex?" Lucy was grateful when Harry placed his hand on her shoulder in a supportive gesture. "How it didn't hurt?"

"So you lied about being virgin. It doesn't mean that she isn't my daughter." Thomas placed a hand against the clear glass.

"I didn't lie about being a virgin. I was until a few days before that first time with you." Lucy reached up and touched Harry's hand, drawing strength from him.

"So are you going to tell me who her father is?" Thomas still wasn't sure he believed Lucy.

"In a moment." Lucy wasn't quite ready to tell him. "First I want you to know that I named my daughter after her father and Rebecca Seville. While I hate you with every fiber in my body, the woman whose son's life you stole is one of the kindest and most generous women I know, and for her kindness towards me, I used her name. But I've named my daughter, Harriet, after her father."

"Harriet?" Thomas glanced at Harry Sebastian.

"He's not the father; you know only too well how he feels about Cassandra. Harry Potter was." Lucy could see that her announcement had struck a nerve. "You really do have a way with women, don't you, Thomas? You drove Mione into Remus' arms because she couldn't bear the thought of her last time being of you raping her." Lucy watched Thomas flinch as she revealed that she knew exactly what he'd done. "And you drove me into Harry's because I couldn't bear the thought of my first time being with you."

Thomas laughed; it wasn't a laugh of derision, more one of finality. "So Potter defeated me in the end, even if the poor bastard didn't know it."

"He always believed he wasn't the one." Lucy couldn't stop her tears as she thought about Harry. "But in the end he was. Through his daughter, he was the one to fulfill the prophecies, and stop you. And I'll be able to tell my daughter that she should be proud of her father; of what he sacrificed in order that you might die."

Showing true anger for the first time, Thomas picked up the chair on his side, and threw it at the glass partition. Made of unbreakable glass, the partition didn't even shudder. "You fucking bitch. If I could kill you, I would, you and your half-breed spawn. I handed my company over to you."

"And I'm taking very good care of it." Lucy smiled tightly at Thomas, completely unaffected by his vitriolic outburst. "With your parents' and Mione's help, and when she's old enough, Maddie will take it over."

"What have you told her about me?" Thomas had been unable to get an answer off anyone.

"You went missing months ago, not long after I was supposedly recovered." Lucy revealed the story that had been put out to the Muggle press. "Despite receiving and paying several ransoms, your body has never been recovered. Tomorrow it will be announced that remains that have been identified as yours have been recovered, together with your family ring, your wallet, and a few other items that belonged to you."

"How can you look my parents and children in the face?" Thomas asked.

"I just think about what you did to the real Thomas Seville, and it makes it easy." Lucy had experienced guilt but she wasn't telling Thomas that. "And you should be aware that your parents know that my daughter isn't your legitimate child. I told them that you were unable to bear children, and that Harriet was fathered by someone else because I wanted a child naturally. They know who her real father is, and being the warm, and wonderful people they are, they've still accepted her as their own, even though both she and I now bear Harry's name."

"You married Potter, yet were still going to marry me?" Thomas wondered just far Lucy's duplicity had gone.

"I married Harry in absentia." Lucy didn't mind telling him the truth. "James Potter offered me that option."

"And my parents still accepted you?" Thomas couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"They are, I've as just said, wonderful people, and very understanding, particularly when I explained about Harry's death at Dominus' hands, and that Harriet is James' only link to his son." Lucy swallowed, as she strove to keep her emotions in check. "And they're supporting both myself and Mione as she's agreed to jointly help me run your company."

"You conniving cunt." Thomas' face was ugly as was his use of language. "You've got no right."

"I've got every right." Lucy snapped. "I had to put up with your attentions for months after you took away my life from me. You owe me."

"I'm going to take it away from you." Thomas screamed at her, any facade of civility now gone. "I demand to see my lawyers."

"You're no rights left, Seville. So demand away. It will do no good. Commander Sebastian isn't just here to support me. He's here to carry out your sentence." Lucy watched Thomas pale. "And for me, it won't come a moment too soon."

Harry decided to terminate the interview. "Do you have anything else you wish to say before the sentence is carried out?"

Thomas slowly shook his head, aware that his time had finally run out. "Hardly."

"So be it." Harry turned to Lucy. "You should leave."

"No." Lucy refused. "I want to see this. I have to see this."

"Very well." Harry turned, opened the door, and beckoned to the four people standing outside. "It's time. I need you all to sign this paper stating that you are acting as witnesses."

"Black, I might have known." Thomas sneered as Sirius came into the room, and added his signature as witness.

"Did you really think I'd miss this?" Sirius hissed at Thomas. "You took my son from me."

"And you took mine." James came in, placing both hands on Lucy's shoulders after signing the paper.

"And mine." Severus signed the paper in turn.

Anna Jameson was the last person to sign. "I've already made arrangements for the disposal afterwards, Sir." She didn't care if Thomas heard her.

"Thanks." Harry smiled at Anna, who'd surprised him by accepting his offer to take his former position as Assistant Head of BritAD, her new title being Lieutenant Commander Jameson, as she preferred it to the simple 'Auror' Harry had favored. In turn, Harry had bestowed the title 'Lieutenant' on Julianne Tracery, as she ranked next, below Anna. Harry touched his wand to a slot next to the glass panel. "Authorization Harry Sebastian Alpha Omega Six."

The glass panel slid down to waist height, and Harry aimed his wand at Thomas. "Evancio Frenum."

Thomas found his arms restrained behind his back. Harry then lowered the glass completely to the ground. "Thomas Seville, by order of Sirius Black, the Minister of Magic, you are hereby sentenced to death." Harry pushed Thomas to his knees, feeling the man resist as well as the tremors that were going through him. "I told you you'd be afraid."

"Go fuck yourself." Thomas had no intention of saying that he was.

"Not exactly fitting last words." Lucy repeated what Thomas had said just before she killed Dumbledore.

Harry touched his wand to the back of Thomas' neck. "So do you have anything a little more profound you wish to say?"

Thomas said nothing, his throat closing up with panic. Harry readied himself, and unlike as he'd threatened to do months earlier, he spoke the entire spell, calmly and clearly, but injecting as much power into it as he could. "Avada Kedavra."

Lucy let out a shuddering breath she hadn't even realized she was holding as the life disappeared from Thomas forever. "It's over. It's really over." She started to cry.

Harry turned to James. "Can you take her out for me, James?"

"I'll take her home." James helped the distressed young woman to her feet and led her out of the room.

Sirius moved to stand over Thomas' body. "I can barely believe he's finally dead."

"Unless he can escape the killing curse, and I don't believe he can." Harry floated the body onto the bed. "Anna, ask Healer McMasters to come in and certify the body. It can then be moved for cremation. I'm making sure this time."

"Yes, Sir." Anna walked out, Severus following behind her.

James and Lucy had both apparated out, back to his home. "I need something to drink."

"I wish I could." Lucy was breastfeeding Harriet, rendering alcohol out of the question. She sat down with James in his study. "I was always so afraid he'd find a way around the charges."

"He didn't and he's never coming back from that, Lucy." James sat down next to her, and took her hand.

"I suppose I should get on with my life now." Lucy felt almost shell-shocked. She was glad that Thomas was dead, but it had been something of anti-climax.

"I want you to know that you can continue to stay here with Harriet." James wanted her to stay in close proximity, as even though he wouldn't see them during term time, he would, like now, during school holidays.

"Thank you." Lucy hadn't decided where to live with her daughter yet, but she understood that James needed the link that Harriet still provided to his son. "Now that the lawyers will formally be able to declare Thomas dead, I'm going to tell Mione that she can use the Island; I always felt as if it was a prison, but she loves it."

"What about the Grimmauld Square property?" James knew that Lucy hadn't decided what to do with it yet.

"I think I'm going to close it up unless Mione wants to use it as a London base." Lucy wanted nothing to do with either of those properties. "The only place I want to be able to use is the house in Sydney. Even though Richard and Rebecca know that Harriet wasn't Thomas', they believe he would have adopted her, and I can't take her away from them. She's only three weeks' old, and they're already crazy about her. And Maddie would never forgive me if I took her 'sister' away from her."

James liked the Sevvilles, and he'd agreed with Lucy. "I don't have a problem with it. I'd rather Harry's daughter was loved by as many people as possible; Harry would have wanted the same. There's been enough hatred and discord." James smiled at her. "You have no idea how much of a difference you and Harriet have made. When you first told me about her, you gave me something back I thought I'd lost; a piece of my son."

Both of them fell silent as they thought about the day when Lucy had revealed her daughter's father to James.

Potter Place - 11th December 2012

Having told Harry Sebastian that she needed to speak to James Potter, a car had been ordered to take her to his home, Tonks opting to ride along with her. On the journey home, she told Tonks nothing, and once inside Potter Place, she'd asked Tonks if she could speak to James alone. "There's something I need to tell him. It's about Harry."

James came running out. "Nymy, what happened? Is everyone else okay?"

"Not now." Tonks kissed her husband's cheek. "Lucy needs to speak to you about Harry."

Lucy was led by James into his study and given a glass of water. "Thank you."

"Did Harry have a message for me?" James asked hopefully.

Lucy shook her head. "Not exactly." She smiled tearfully at James. "I believe you have something that belongs to me, or at least I hope you do."

"I don't understand." James had no idea what she was talking about.

"Did Harry have anything on him when they found him?" Lucy asked. "Around his neck."

"Yes." James went to his safe and took out the chain and rings. "How did you know about these?"

"Harry gave the engagement ring to me." Lucy revealed. "After telling me he loved me."

"You were together?" James was shocked.

"Not exactly." Lucy took a sip of water. "It was just the one night."

"Can you tell me?" James had to know whether his son had finally found some peace.

"Of course." Lucy told James, keeping most of it private, but providing enough detail for him to understand how close she and Harry had become since they'd first started meeting.

11th September 2012

"I'm sorry but there's nothing going on." Lucy apologized that she hadn't found anything out. "He's seeing his kids tonight. I said I'd stay here; give him some one-on-one time with them this weekend."

"I know he's with his kids, and after seeing you heading to your rooms here, I thought I'd use the opportunity to see if you knew anything." Harry thought Lucy looked tired. "You've obviously offered to stay behind for a reason. How are you holding up?"

"It's getting harder, and the more time that goes by, the more pressure he's putting on me." Lucy was glad she had someone to confide in. "I've held out as long as I can. The only reason he didn't take things further last time was because I told him I was a virgin."

Harry snorted. "He bought that?"

"Yes." Lucy glowered at Harry. "Because it's true."

Harry was completely flabbergasted. "But you're twenty-six."

"I wanted my first time to be with someone I loved; someone I was married to." Lucy laughed resentfully. "Not that that's going to happen now."

"You're scared, aren't you?" Harry could feel her trying to control her panic.

"Terrified." Lucy laughed again, but this time her laughter was marred by tears. "Stupid really. I wasn't this frightened even when I stood up to you, Greyback and Thomas together at the Ministry. But the thought of him kissing me, touching me like that, having sex with me, scares the hell out of me."

"Come here." Harry took Lucy into his arms as she burst into tears. "I wish I could help."

"If I thought Thomas fancied you, then I'd let you." Lucy tried to make a joke as she strove to stem her tears. "I knew that this was what the Minister expected of me when he told me about Thomas and trying to infiltrate this place. But when I thought about it when I was alone in that cell, I started to get frightened. Thomas is the worst kind of human being, Harry, and the thought of someone like that taking something so precious from me disgusts me beyond belief."

Harry knew she was talking about more than that. "You don't just mean your virginity, do you?"

"No, I don't." Lucy confirmed his question. "He started by taking away my choice to say no when I killed Dumbledore; then he took away my life. Soon he'll turn what should be a beloved and beautiful night into a contaminated recollection of something I never wanted."

Harry was almost overwhelmed by Lucy's feelings of revulsion for Thomas. "Lucy, perhaps you should get out as Harry suggested."

"I can't." Lucy refused. "We're running out of time, and no-one is going to be able to get closer to him than I can now; not even you." She tried to smile. "I'm afraid I'm on my own, and as much as you want to help me, you can't."

Harry looked into Lucy's eyes. "There is actually something I can do for you."

"Killing Thomas would be top of my list." Lucy knew, however, that Harry was unable to do that.

"I'd like to oblige but we both know that that isn't going to happen." Harry slid his fingers into her hair. "But I can do this."

Lucy's eyelids fluttered shut as Harry kissed her. When he lifted his head, Lucy once again met his gaze. "What are you doing?"

"Giving you a beautiful memory if you'll let me." Harry moved his hands to the belt on Lucy's robe. "Will you let me, Lucy?"

For Lucy it was as if her stomach had gone into freefall, and she nodded jerkily. "Yes."

Harry untied Lucy's belt and slipped her robe from her shoulders. "You are so tiny, Lucy. But you're perfect."

"Harry, I know why you're doing this." Lucy shivered when Harry's lips encountered her bare shoulder. "So you don't need to flatter me."

"I'm being honest." Harry found Lucy's pulse beating in the crook of her neck, and he whispered as he kissed it. "You smell like vanilla and honey."

"Perhaps I do like being flattered." Lucy moved her head so that Harry could move his lips higher. "So feel free to carry on."

"You're nervous, aren't you?" Harry realized that Lucy's talking was to cover it up. He began to unbutton his shirt as he shifted his attention to Lucy's jawline.

"Yes." But Lucy's words stopped, and her nerves vanished as Harry's mouth found hers again.

The Next Morning

The sun was just beginning to rise when Lucy was swept by a wave of regret coming from Harry, and she knew what it meant. "You have to go, don't you?"

"It wouldn't do for Thomas to come back early and find me here." Harry kissed her forehead. "And Cassandra will be wondering what's happened to me."

"She worries about you, doesn't she?" Lucy was aware that there was nothing more than friendship between the couple.

"She does." Harry felt that she worried too much. "And I care about her as well. Just as I care about you."

"You need someone who cares about you, Harry." Lucy left it unspoken that he could now add her to the list.

"I didn't think I did." Harry thought about how hard he'd become, and how much he didn't want anyone to get close to him. "But maybe I do after all."

"We all do." Lucy twisted in his arms so that she could look down at him. "I really wish you could stay."

"So do I." Harry pulled her head down to him and kissed her. "But I'm responsible for enough deaths without adding yours to the mix."

"Will you make love to me again before you go?" Lucy wanted as many good memories as she could get; almost as a weapon against what she knew would have to come.

In answer Harry sat up and lifted Lucy onto his lap. "Just once more."

Facing each other, the two of them made love. They each kept their eyes on the other one's face; both wanting to witness the other one's reactions; to file them away like a good luck charm; something to keep them both going. Because of that, unlike the second time they'd made love during the night when they'd come together in a furious tangle of arms and legs, lips and tongues, this was a gentle, slow-burning union. And both of them tried to make the experience last; neither wanting it to be over. But as with all things, it eventually came to an end.

Lucy found herself near to tears. "Why now?"

Able to feel her emotions, Harry understood what she was saying. "I don't know, Lucy." He gave Lucy one final kiss, before lifting her off him, and getting out of the bed. "Please be careful."

"You too." As Lucy watched Harry get up out of bed, she grabbed his wrist, and pulled him back to her, kissing him. "Now go."

11th December 2012

Lucy wiped her eyes. "We had very little time together after that, just a few snatched moments, but we both knew how each of us felt about the other."

"Did he mark you?" James knew it was personal but he had to know.

"No." While Lucy knew that Harry had loved her in his own way, it wasn't the same way he'd felt about Cammie. "It was only after we made love that last time, that I realized how I felt about him, and for him it was the same."

"Did he give you the ring then?" James asked.

"No." Lucy twisted the engagement ring that now sat on her finger. "The day before he gave himself up, he asked me to marry him. At first I refused, knowing what I was going to have to do. But Harry said he understood that I was going to have to sleep with Thomas, just as he would have to kill for him. And he told me that no matter, he still wanted to marry me. He then gave me the ring but I couldn't keep it, so Harry said he'd carry it close to his heart instead. And then he was gone, and I'm never going to see him again."

She started to sob, and James pulled her into his arms. "I'm so sorry, Lucy. But I'm glad you brought my son some peace of mind."

Lucy took several gulps of air. "I haven't finished. Harry didn't only give me a ring, he also gave me something more precious." She placed her hand over her stomach. "This isn't Thomas' daughter; she's Harry's."

James was now even more shocked. "He didn't know, did he?"

Lucy shook her head. "I only found out myself six weeks afterwards. I just knew she wasn't Thomas' daughter, and a test I conducted proved that. Thomas never once considered she might not be his; he just accepted that his contraceptive spell had failed."

James was reeling. "So it was Harry's daughter that Thomas felt love for, and it's her who caused his downfall."

"Exactly as the prophecy predicted." Lucy smiled sadly. "Harry always believed that he wasn't the one, but he was. It was only because of him that Thomas fell."

"What are you going to tell Seville's parents?" James had no idea if they knew Lucy was pregnant or not.

"I can't tell them the truth." Lucy couldn't hurt them like that. "I'll figure something out. Something that won't hurt them. They deserve the truth but it would be too devastating."

"I agree." James took Lucy's hands in his. "I want you to stay with us. I'm going to take care of you, just as Harry would have. I'm also going to invoke an old pureblood right, if you want it, which will allow you to become Harry's wife, even after his death. It was used where an heir had died, and his fiancée was pregnant. Usually it was because she was expecting a male son, a new heir, but even though I know you're expecting a girl, I still want to offer this to you. As head of the Potter household, I can sanction the marriage in absentia."

Lucy placed her hand on her stomach. "She'd be a Potter?"

"As would you." James handed over the smaller of the two wedding rings. "Do you want this?"

Lucy took the ring from James, and slid it onto her finger. "I think Harry would have wanted this."

"So do I." James hugged Lucy. "It will take a few days to brew the necessary potions as they're rather complicated and rarely used, but I think know someone who would be willing to make them."

"Then I'd like that." Lucy smiled at the man who would become her father-in-law. "And I'd like to stay here, if you really me want to."

"I do." James smiled, his face alight for the first time since Harry's death. "Let's go tell everyone the good news."

October 1st 2014

As with everything, time moved on, and Thomas' death became history. H.J. had decided the day after Thomas' execution, that he would no longer be effective as an Auror, and accepted James' offer of the Defense position that Orion had once held. He was also introduced to another new teacher, Jessica Hammond, the Muggle studies teacher, whose husband had died during one of the attacks on wizarding London, and her two sons, Toby and Daniel. Jessica was pretty, young, and had curly brown hair, and sparkling brown eyes. Everyone but H.J. had noticed how much like Hermione she looked. Within six weeks, they were dating, and, during a visit when she'd dropped Sevvie off to stay with him, Luna had found herself warning H.J. that it was too quick. H.J. had ignored Luna's warnings, and before anyone could draw breath, had asked Jessica to marry him.

And it was at their wedding, that Luna now found herself alone with Jessica. "I suppose I should congratulate you."

Jessica knew that Luna didn't like her. "As it's my wedding day, that would be the correct social etiquette, not that you've ever been one to stand by it."

Luna recognized that now Jessica was securely married to H.J, the gloves were off, and she let the girl know what she really felt. "You're a fool if you believe that he'll ever love you like he loved her. You deliberately went after him. He was vulnerable, and you swooped in like a vulture."

"I love, H.J." Jessica did. "And he loves me. Otherwise he wouldn't have married me, and he wouldn't have taken my sons on as his own."

"He just thinks he loves you." Luna didn't truly believe that H.J. did. "You'll just be a carbon copy of the woman he really wants. And if you really loved H.J., you'd have been doing everything you could have to try and help him get over Hermione; but you didn't. Instead you

pursued him, until you got what you wanted. Well, now you've got it, I hope you'll be very happy."

H.J. caught only the last few words as he joined his new bride and friend, and don't notice the sarcasm in them. "We will, thank you, Luna."

Jessica smirked as she wrapped her arms around H.J.'s waist. "I'm going to make sure of it."

Unable to stay in case she said something she really regretted, Luna stalked off to join Xander, and her mother, where they were sitting with Lavinia's relatively new husband. Lavinia listened to Luna's rant. "I know Hermione's your friend, but you have to see it from Jessica's point of view. She loves H.J. just as much as Hermione once did. And it's never easy to see a man you know should be with one person marrying someone else, or even falling for someone else."

"You're never going to let me live that down are you?" Severus drawled to his wife. "We were only twelve."

"But I knew you were meant for me." Lavinia had had to watch Severus become infatuated with Lily Evans, before she met Luna's father, and had known she could be happy with him as well.

"Yes, dear." Severus kissed his wife's cheek before turning back to talk to Xander.

Luna still found it hard to believe that her mother and Severus were married. The two had come face to face at Harry Potter's funeral, and Severus had ended up being comforted by Lavinia; his own affair with Petronella Black long over. He'd begun courting her, and she'd accepted his marriage proposal less than a year later. When they'd married, his children had become hers when, as he'd promised Lily he'd do, he enacted the Abrogo Progenitor ritual.

After shaking away the memories, Luna lowered her voice so that only Lavinia could hear. "Are you really happy with him?"

"Yes, I am." Lavinia nodded, understanding her daughter's dismay.
"But you know I loved Daddy very much, don't you?"

"I do." Luna sighed, and returned to the subject of H.J. and Hermione.
"I wish Hermione had reconsidered. But it's too late now."

"It was just meant to be, Luna." Lavinia tweaked her daughter's cheek.
"Just as I was meant to eventually find Severus again, perhaps H.J. will someday find Hermione in the same way."

"I hope so." Luna glared at the woman on the dance floor, supporting H.J. as he hobbled his way around during the first dance. "Because I can genuinely say that I've hated just two people in my life, and that hag is one of them."

"Hush. This is so not like you." Lavinia chided her daughter. "Just be glad that H.J. has found someone to make him happy."

"Trust me." Luna had a sudden feeling wash over her. "It won't last."

Next Chapter: H.J. takes up a new post; Cammie finally forgives him; Maddie grows up.

Chapter 87: A Change of Heart

September 1st 2025

Hermione Weasley placed a photo onto the dresser in her daughter's college room. "I'm so proud of you making it into the Salem Academy, Billie."

The auburn haired girl glanced at the photo of Hermione and her father, the two of them waving happily at her from the photo frame. "I wish Dad could have been here. I miss him so much."

Hermione hugged Billie. "So do I, sweetie."

Molly picked up a paperweight. "Mummy, can I come here?"

Billie walked over to her little sister, and removed the paperweight out of her hands. "Of course you can, pipsqueak, in another thirteen years, but first you've got all the fun of going to Salem's Girls' School."

"Boring." Artie Weasley pulled a face. "It's a lame school. The San Francisco Magical Conservatory is much better."

"Seeing as you've got another two years to go before you get there, I'd keep your opinions to yourself, little brother." Billie quashed her brother before he got too carried away. "Both schools are highly well thought of."

"And don't think you'll just be able to pop home young man if you do go there." Hermione warned her son. "Because you won't."

"I know, Mum." Artie had hoped for exactly that.

Billie looked at the time. "We'd better go. The Headmistress will be beginning her speech shortly."

Parents and families were encouraged to attend this first speech as it usually addressed the concerns of parents as to what to expect. With the lecture about to start, Hermione and her three children slipped

into the back of the large auditorium to listen. Hermione concentrated on what the Headmistress had to say before five students were brought to the attention of the others.

Joyce Martinson looked down at the piece of paper she'd made her notes on. "We're proud to have among us this year the top five students from some of the best schools in the world. Francesca Appleton from Barstow Academy, please join me."

She read out two more names before calling out a familiar one. "Severus Sebastian from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry."

Artie's head shot round to see his brother get up. "Mum, why didn't he tell us?"

"I don't know." Hermione felt hurt that her eldest son, who admittedly had grown closer to her ex-husband as he'd attended Hogwarts where H.J. taught, hadn't told her that he had applied.

Their attention was caught again when Billie's own name was called. "And finally from Salem's Girls' School, Wilhelmina Weasley."

"Go." Hermione urged her daughter, whose mouth was wide open in shock.

On the other side of the auditorium, at the mention of the girl's name, H.J.'s head shot round just as Artie's had, and he located his former wife's position. As Billie made her way to the podium, H.J. wished he could go over to Hermione. But now that the outstanding new recruits had been announced, his own name was going to be called.

"Now, I'd like to introduce you to the teaching staff." Joyce listed the staff. "And finally a warm welcome to our newest member, who will be the new head of our Defense Department, Professor H.J. Sebastian."

Hermione's stomach flopped over at the sight of her former husband leaning heavily on his cane as he limped up to the podium to join the other staff.

Afterwards, Hermione wanted to escape but a reception for the new students and their parents was being held, and she couldn't get away. Instead she buttonholed her son. "Sevvy, why didn't you tell me?"

"I wanted it to be a surprise." Sevvy's face was bright red. "And I knew you wouldn't have come if you found out Dad was going to be here."

"Sevvy, it wouldn't have mattered." Hermione touched her son's face. "You're my son and this is important."

Hermione's stomach flipped again as a deep voice she hadn't heard in years came from behind her. "Hello, Hermione."

Plastering a smile on her face, Hermione turned around. "H.J., I didn't know you'd left Hogwarts."

Sevvy melted away as H.J. took his place opposite Hermione. "I needed a change of scenery after the divorce."

"I was sorry to hear that things didn't work out for you." Hermione responded politely.

"And I was sorry to hear about your husband's death." H.J. had liked Charlie Weasley.

"Thank you." Hermione still missed her husband, even though it had been three years since he'd been killed while rescuing a young Muggle girl who'd accidentally strayed into the dragon sanctuary he'd been working in in the Rocky Mountains.

"I didn't expect to see you here." H.J. maneuvered them to the bar so that he could sit down, his leg beginning to ache. "Sevvy said you couldn't make it."

"Sevvy lied." Hermione informed H.J. as she reluctantly sat down. "He didn't even tell me he'd applied here, let alone had been accepted."

H.J.'s face tightened. "The little..."

Hermione interrupted him. "He didn't think I'd come if I knew you'd be here."

"And would you have?" H.J. asked as he studied his former wife's features.

"Yes, Sevv's my son." Hermione snapped, hurt that H.J. would think that she'd put her feelings about him before her son. "And in case you missed the announcement, my daughter is here as well."

"I know. I had a list of the new recruits, and saw Billie's name on it, which was why I was a little surprised when Sevv said you wouldn't be here." H.J. had been disappointed that his ex-wife hated him that much.

"As I'm the only parent she has left, I wouldn't have let her down by not attending. She may not be my biological daughter but I love her as much as if she was." Hermione glanced over to where Billie was talking to her siblings, including Sevv and his two younger brothers, who H.J. had adopted via the Abrogo ritual. "And I presume you feel the same way about Toby and Daniel." Hermione took a closer look at them. "They don't really look anything like you, do they?"

"Thankfully not. Despite the Abrogo ritual they still look like Jess but unfortunately the poor buggers have inherited my bad eyesight. I don't think Jess expected that to happen when I agreed to the ritual." H.J. glanced at the younger boy and girl with Billie. "Your two youngest look a lot like you."

"I was hoping Molly would take after Charlie." Hermione's daughter had had blond hair when she was born, but like Artie's had begun to darken when she was still a baby. "We both knew she wasn't going to be a redhead by the time she reached her second birthday. Unfortunately Charlie didn't get to see her third one."

"It was a brave thing he did, Hermione." H.J. tentatively reached out and placed his hand over Hermione's. "And I am truly sorry."

Hermione swallowed, every inch of her skin aware of H.J.'s touch. "I believe you."

H.J. withdrew his hand. "How did you meet?"

"Billie was sick, and came into the hospital where I work." Hermione smiled as she thought about how frightened the tiny red-headed girl had been. "Her tonsils were inflamed, and, although compared to Muggle treatment removing them was a relatively simple procedure, she still screamed the place down. I found her running up the corridor, and Charlie was dashing after her."

"I remember him from Xander's wedding." H.J. had liked the friendly man. "When did he meet Billie's mother?"

"Not long after the wedding." Hermione had once asked the same thing. "But they were never married. She became pregnant by mistake, and didn't want the baby, so Charlie asked her to have it, and he took full responsibility for Billie once she was born."

"Both you and he have obviously done a good a job in raising her." H.J. complimented Hermione. "It must have been hard for you when you lost him."

"It was." Hermione had felt as though her world had ended when Charlie's friend and colleague had come to tell her that he'd been killed. "But the children got me through it."

Changing the subject to something a little less depressing, H.J. asked about Hermione's lodgings. "Where are you staying?"

"The Marriott on the waterfront in Boston." Hermione had decided to stay in a Muggle hotel, aware that the wizarding ones would be full. "I suppose you're staying at your quarters here."

H.J. acknowledged he was, before making a suggestion. "Hermione, I know things didn't end well between us but please, and I have no agenda except wanting to catch up, will you all have dinner with me? You can stay overnight. There's an extra room in my quarters. I can bunk in with the boys and you can have my room."

Hermione wasn't so sure that would be a good idea. "H.J. I don't think..."

"Please." H.J. took her hand again as he interrupted her. "I'm going to be your daughter's teacher, and I don't want things to be awkward between Billie and myself because of our own history."

Hermione would have done anything for her children, and recognizing the validity of H.J.'s plea, she found herself agreeing. "Okay, just this once."

"I'll wait for you after this ends." H.J. then let go of her hand, got up and walked off.

Billie immediately joined her mother. "Mum, what did Professor Sebastian want?"

"Since he's going to be your new teacher, he thought it would be a good idea for all of us to have dinner tonight." Hermione explained. "He doesn't want things to be awkward for you because I was once married to him."

Billie was pleased, as although she knew who Sevv's father was, she'd never actually met him before, since Luna had usually acted as a delivery system when Sevv travelled back and forth between his parents. "I think it's a good idea, Mum."

The dinner later that evening turned out to be successful with all six children getting along well. When the youngest children started drooping, Molly dropping off to sleep totally, Sevv got up. "It's getting late, Mum. I'll escort Billie back to her room."

"Thanks, Sevv." Hermione was glad that the two children had a good relationship, and she hugged both of her children.

H.J., who had already chewed Sevv out for his actions, gave Sevv a warning and a reminder. "As soon as Billie is safely inside, you are to head straight for your room. And don't forget, apart from school

related activities, you're grounded for a month."

"Yes, Sir." Sevvv followed Billie out of the room. Once they were standing in the darkened area of grassland outside of the teachers' quarters, he turned to Billie, and wrapped his arms around her waist. "Do you think it will work?"

Billie rested her head against his chest. "I don't know, Sev. But Mum isn't happy. Even though I know Mum loved Dad, and that she was heartbroken when he died, I still sometimes see a sad look on her face whenever your father is mentioned."

"And I know Dad only married Jessica because he was trying to replace Mum." Severus pulled a face. "Their arguments were bloody awful by the time they decided to call it quits. He should never have married her."

"That's what Aunt Luna said. She also told me that she thinks that our parents should never have split up. But I'm glad they did otherwise I probably would never have met you." Billie glanced up worriedly at Sevvv. "Sev, you do know that our parents are going to flip when they find out about us."

Sevvv didn't care. "It's not as if we're related. Mum is only your guardian."

"She's my mother." Billie corrected him. "Even if the papers call her my guardian, that's how I think of her." Even though Billie's birth mother hadn't wanted Billie, she'd still refused Charlie's request for Hermione to adopt Billie, and he'd therefore taken steps to make Hermione Billie's guardian instead, just in case the worst had ever happened, as it had done.

"I'm glad you feel like that about Mum." Sevvv had never felt like that about Jessica.

"She's the best mum I could have ever asked for." Billie heard the school clock chiming in the distance, and glanced her at wristwatch. "I'd better get in. It's eleven o'clock."

"Kiss me first." Sevvv demanded, telling Billie how he felt about her after the kiss had ended. "Billie, I love you."

"I love you too." Billie returned the same sentiments to the young man that she'd secretly been dating ever since she was fifteen, and the two of them had discovered how each other felt when they had been larking about under a piece of mistletoe.

Completely unaware of what was happening outside the building, H.J. shepherded his protesting twins to bed. "You've got an early portkey tomorrow to take you back to Hogwarts."

Hermione scooped up her sleeping daughter. "Where can I put her?"

"In here." H.J. opened the bedroom door. "There's another bed Artie can use."

"Do I have to sleep in here with her?" Artie whined.

"Yes, now get into those pajamas and into bed." Hermione ordered.

"There's a bathroom through there." H.J. pointed to the door. "I've put some toothpaste, towels and toothbrushes in there."

"I won't wake Molly." Hermione flicked her wand, transfiguring her daughter's dress into a long nightgown, and placed her in bed before H.J. pulled the covers over her. "One night without brushing her teeth won't hurt. Not you, Artie. Into that bathroom."

After closing the door on her children, Hermione followed H.J. back into the sitting room, and looked around. "This feels a little odd."

"It was a strange evening being here with our assorted children." H.J.'s face took on a slightly sad look. "I just wish Cammie had been here as well. It's hard not knowing where she is, and what's she doing."

Hermione tried not to look guilty. "Do you regret what you did?"

"Every day." H.J. gave a wry smile. "I didn't want her to go back to him, and instead I made it worse."

"What would you do if you could see her now?" Hermione took a mouthful of the red wine she still had left from dinner.

"Tell her I loved her, that I miss her, and that I'm sorry." H.J. felt himself choking up and he coughed to cover it up. "Sorry."

Hermione was hit by a massive dose of guilt. "But you'd tell Harry where Regulus was if you ever found her again, wouldn't you?"

"I don't know." H.J. had thought long and hard over the years about what he'd do if he ever saw his daughter again. "I've got no idea what the circumstances are anymore."

"What about if they'd built up a new life for themselves; a life where they're happy together?" Hermione tried to keep her tone casual. "A life where they're hurting no-one?"

In such an introspective mood, H.J. didn't notice his former wife's gentle fishing. "Then I wouldn't interfere. Cammie already hates me enough without making it worse."

Hermione was silent for a few moments, before she got up, and picked up her purse. "I have something to show you. And I'll understand if you want me to go after you've seen it."

H.J. took the Muggle photo that Hermione removed from her purse. "Merlin." He looked up at his former wife. "How?"

"Cammie sent it to me. It's her firstborn son." Hermione sat back down, placing her purse at her feet. "That's a copy. I have the original at home." Hermione apologized. "I'm sorry, H.J. I wish I could have told you sooner that she'd sent me these." Hermione's oath prevented her from telling H.J. where Cammie was, and the photo fell outside the oath, but on seeing H.J.'s face as he looked at it, she now wished she could bring the two back together, and tell him where his daughter was living.

"I don't blame you for not telling me." H.J. couldn't take his eyes of the photo of his daughter and a tiny baby. "What's his name?"

"Samuel; he's thirteen now as you'd know." Hermione reached into her purse and took out yet another photo, before passing it to H.J. "That's Mel, she's eleven, Meron, she's six, and Thomas Harrison who's five."

H.J. let his tears fall as he surveyed the grandchildren he'd never seen before. "They're beautiful."

"I have a photo taken just after every birth, and the group one is the one from last Christmas that Cammie sent to me." Hermione met H.J.'s damp gaze. "I really do wish I could have told you sooner."

"I didn't give you any reason to, and you were afraid I'd tell Harry that she'd been in contact, weren't you?" H.J. ran a finger over the Muggle photo.

"Yes." Hermione closed her purse.

"You can trust me." H.J. held the second photo back out. "I won't say anything to Harry."

"I also have a copy of that." Hermione kept only Sam's birth photo and the latest Christmas photo in her purse. "And if I didn't think you really regretted what you'd done and that I couldn't trust you, I wouldn't have shown you the photos now."

H.J. sighed regretfully. "I wish I could turn back time."

"You did that once and look what happened." Hermione reminded him. "Neither of us can turn back the clock now, so we just have to live with our decisions."

"You're right, and as much as I regret what's happened in my past, I wouldn't want to give up my sons." H.J. loved Toby and Daniel as much as if they'd been his own.

"And I wouldn't give up any of my children either." Hermione put down her empty glass.

H.J. had a question about Hermione's marriage. "Were you happy with Charlie?"

"Very much." Hermione thought about her former husband. "And I still miss him. But as hard as it was for us, it's been harder on Molly and Arthur. They lost Ginny and Bill to the war, and George at the Ministry, so Charlie's death was devastating to them. They'd have been here today but Molly's not been well."

H.J. remembered the Molly Weasley from his time. "I'm sorry to hear that. If she was anything like the Mrs. Weasley I knew, then she's a warm and kind person, who didn't deserve any of this."

"She is." Hermione wiped her eyes to drag away the tears that were starting to form. "How about you? Were you happy?"

"I thought I was." H.J. had tried hard to make his marriage work. "Until Jess pointed out something during what had to be the worst argument we'd ever had. It was just after that that I filed for divorce."

"It must have been a pretty profound observation for you to get divorced over it." Hermione commented.

"It was." H.J. could still remember the stunned feeling he experienced as his wife's words had sunk in. "She said that none of my friends liked her because she wasn't you, and that Luna had once called her a carbon copy. And it was then that I realized it was true, I'd married her to try and replace you. All that time, and I never noticed until then that they'd been right."

Hermione shifted in her seat. "H.J..."

"Sorry, I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable." H.J. could see that he had. "Perhaps we'd better call it a night."

Hermione immediately got to her feet, taking the out that H.J. had just offered her. "I think that's a good idea. If I don't see you in the morning, it's been a pleasant evening."

H.J. knew that he wouldn't see her. With the time difference he'd be up at four in order to get the boys to London in time for the Hogwarts Express. "Have a safe journey home."

Hermione hesitated, before pulling a card out of her handbag, and scribbling something on it. "This is my office number, and my home number. The Academy has it but I'd feel better if you had it as well. Just in case anything should happen to Billie."

H.J. glanced at the card, which informed him that Hermione was the Assistant Administrator at the Howard Boardman Hospital for Magical Maladies in San Francisco. "I'll put it somewhere safe."

Hermione headed into the room H.J. had already pointed out to her. "Goodnight, H.J.."

"Goodnight, Hermione." H.J. doused the lights and made his own way to the room he was going to share that night.

4 January 2026

Hermione got worriedly to her feet at the sight of a familiar face entering her office. "Is something wrong with Billie or Sevvie? The Academy didn't call."

"Nothing's wrong with the kids." H.J. rushed to calm her down. "We're in the area on a field trip, and I had some free time so I thought I'd look you up. Your secretary said it was okay to come straight in."

"It is." Hermione always held an open door policy. "Why didn't you call ahead?"

"It was a spur of the moment thing." H.J. lied. "Are you free for dinner tonight?"

"Yes, but, but..." Hermione stuttered.

H.J. interrupted her before she could make an excuse. "Then I'll pick you up at seven."

Hermione sat back down as H.J. vanished. "Well!"

Later that evening

As they walked slowly back to her house to accommodate H.J.'s gait, Hermione decided that she'd had a nice time. "H.J., thank you for this evening. I'm glad that we can be friends again."

"So am I." H.J. took Hermione's hand and kissed it. "I'd best get back. I need to do a headcount to make sure the students are all in. I trust them but you never know."

"When do you leave?" Hermione realized that she hadn't asked him.

"Sunday night." H.J. had brought his best ten students along to attend lectures on defense being given, amongst others, by Harry, Destin Simon, now head of French Auror Division, and Michaela Grant, who'd returned to her maiden name after Nathan had been imprisoned for life, and she'd divorced him.

"Do you want to come out with us to dinner on Saturday? We're going to the Crabshack." Hermione found herself offering. "I'm afraid it will be a little noisy though, as Molly and Artie have school friends staying over, but it's where they all want to go."

"I'd like that." H.J. wasn't going to turn down an invitation to dinner with his former wife, even a noisy one overrun with children. "Do you want me to bring Sevvie and Billie?"

Hermione's face lit up. "Can you? We're eating at six o'clock before the kids head back to my place for a sleepover."

"Six o'clock, but I'll have to pass on the sleepover." H.J. grinned, getting an answering smile from Hermione. "Goodnight, Hermione."

"Goodnight, H.J." Hermione let herself in as H.J. turned and limped away. When she turned around at the sound of a faint crack, he'd gone.

24 December 2026

Hermione checked for the fourth time that she'd put fresh towels in the bathroom she was giving H.J. "I wish I could find the other set of guest towels. The small one has bleach stains on it." Even though she could have laundered the towels magically, Hermione found she preferred the smell of them after using the Muggle method much better.

Billie grinned at her mother's panic. "Mum, stop worrying. It's only Sevv's Dad."

Sevv had never seen his mother this panicked before. "Yeah, Mum. Relax. Dad won't care what his towels look like, as long as he's got somewhere to sleep. He'd sleep on the floor if he had to."

"Mum, where's my iPod Sylph?" Even though he was a wizard, being friends with Luna's and Cammie's children, Artie was no different in wanting the same as the other Muggle orientated children, and Hermione had found herself buying a computer and the associated peripherals that went with it because of that.

"In your room." Hermione and Charlie had moved house when Molly had been born, so that she now had five bedrooms, but even so, she had had to move one of the children out in order to give H.J. a room of his own. "Billie, thanks for sharing with Molly."

"I'm sure H.J. didn't want to sleep in a room with Hello Kitty everywhere." Billie remarked lightly.

Sevv smirked at her. "You could always sleep in with me."

Hermione caught her daughter's scandalized look. "Sevv, don't tease your sister."

"Sorry, Mum." Neither Sevvy nor Billie had still plucked up the courage to tell either of their parents what was going on yet.

The doorbell rang. "I'll get it." Molly screamed as she ran headlong towards the entrance.

H.J. was greeted by an excited six year old, and the smells of cinnamon and baking bread. "Hello, Molly."

"Have you bought me a present?" Molly greeted H.J.

"Good grief." Hermione shepherded her daughter away from H.J. "Sorry, H.J., she's been asking that of everyone. Come in."

H.J. looked around with interest, as despite his previous visits, he'd never actually been in the house before. "This is a nice house."

"It was built in 1904." Billie walked into the hallway and hugged H.J. "Mum and Dad did all the renovation work on it."

"They did a nice job." H.J. was glad to see that Billie felt comfortable enough to mention Charlie around him. He'd had several chats with her to put her mind at rest that he was just interested in being Hermione's friend again, and wasn't a threat.

"Hi Dad." Sevvy hugged H.J. "And I'm going to be like Molly. Have you got me a present?"

"I've got presents for everyone." H.J. kissed his son's cheek before letting go of him. "Where's Artie?"

"In his room listening to his iPod." Billie rolled her eyes. "He's got David and Claire Harris up there as well. Aunt Luna and Uncle Xander will be coming around shortly with the rest of the brood."

H.J. knew that the rest of the brood meant Matthew, Christian and Mara. "So no magic?"

"No magic." Hermione confirmed.

Even after Luna and Xander's remaining three children had all turned out to be magical, because the eldest two children were squibs, the family continued to live without magic, and Luna and Xander had decided not to tell them anything until David received his letter at eleven, which was still eighteen months' away.

Molly had found the cookies Hermione had hidden, and was chewing on one. "Mummy, are Thomas, Meron and Joyce coming? Aunt Buffy said she'd read us all a story the next time."

Buffy had moved to San Francisco eight years earlier with Sophia and Emily. Having one of her feelings, Luna had introduced Buffy to her boss at the Cetacean Institute, Sheldon Harper, and six months later they'd married. Two years after that Joyce, their daughter, had been born, and it had been Xander who had told Buffy about Cammie, knowing that she'd understand about Reg because of Buffy's former feelings for Angel, and, as he'd expected, she'd agreed not to say anything, and had soon become part of their group.

At the mention of Cammie's and Buffy's children, Hermione stiffened as she realized what her daughter had given away. "No honey, not tonight."

"Oh." Molly's face fell. "So it's only Mara coming?"

"For you to play with, yes." Hermione was now totally flustered and headed into the kitchen, completely aware of H.J. behind her.

"When were you going to tell me?" H.J. asked quietly.

"Can we talk tonight?" Hermione didn't want to have the conversation in front of the children.

"Yes." H.J. walked out of the kitchen, and greeted Luna who'd just arrived. "How are you?"

"I'm fine." Luna kissed H.J. "I was surprised when Hermione said you were staying."

"Now that Hermione and I are friends again, Sevvv asked if we could all spend Christmas together as a family." H.J. wondered if Luna knew about his daughter, but he said nothing, not wanting to sour the mood, and he turned the subject away from families. "So how are things at the Cetacean Institute?"

"Wet." Luna giggled. "We have a new whale who takes great delight in soaking me every time I walk past."

"That's his way of saying he loves you." Xander wrapped his arms around his wife. "Just like I do."

H.J. felt his own heart contract as Luna gave Xander a look of pure unadulterated love. Even though the two of them had been married for over twenty years, it was obvious that they were still as in love now, as they had been then. "It's nice to see a couple like you."

Xander glanced behind him towards the kitchen. "She's still misses you, you know."

"Xander." Luna hissed. "She'll hear you."

"Well, it's true." Xander defended himself. "Hermione's always talking about H.J."

"Really?" H.J. hadn't been sure if he still stood a chance with Hermione or not.

"Yes." Luna admitted, after checking that Hermione was still in the kitchen. "She loved Charlie, but she's never forgotten how she felt about you."

"Likewise." H.J. smiled ruefully. "I made a terrible mistake marrying Jess, but I love the boys, and for that reason alone I'm glad I did it."

"They're good boys." Luna liked the twins. "Even if their mother isn't exactly my favorite person."

H.J. knew by now how Luna felt about Jessica. "You warned me to slow down, but like an idiot I didn't listen. I just wanted to be loved again."

"It's only human nature." Xander commiserated with H.J. "And look on the bright side, maybe you've got a second chance now."

"Perhaps you're right." H.J. then changed the conversation as Hermione joined them. "I should get everyone some drinks."

The adults then sat down to talk as the children ran riot throughout the house.

Later that night

Hermione braced herself once everyone had said goodnight and left. "Let's go into the sitting room."

H.J. put up a silencing spell so that the children wouldn't overhear their conversation, and he let the words that he'd had to pent up all night spew out. "How could you, Hermione? You've had enough opportunities over the last year to tell me about Cammie. It hurts to know that I spilled my guts to you about how much I regretted what I'd done to Cammie, and that I wished I could make it up to her. And you just sat there and listened. I thought she'd only sent you photos; not that you knew where she was."

"I'm sorry." Hermione apologized. "But it was hard for me too to have to listen to you and knowing I couldn't tell you."

"Couldn't tell me or didn't trust me enough to tell me?" H.J.'s anger showed in his voice. "I thought we were friends again."

"We are." Hermione had seen H.J. almost every month since he'd first turned up at the start of the year and taken her to dinner. "H.J. I wanted to tell you but she said no."

H.J.'s anger deflated into fully-fledged hurt. "Cammie said you couldn't tell me?"

"I'm sorry, but yes. I told her I'd shown you the photos last year, and she was okay with it but she's too scared about her children and Dae to let me tell you that I saw them on a regular basis." Hermione defended her daughter's hurtful decision.

Dae's name caught H.J.'s attention as it came up, and he suddenly made the connection as to where he'd heard it before, Sevvu often mentioning an Uncle Dae, but not once had H.J. ever connected the name with Regulus Black. "Not Dae, as in Dae McMillan?"

Hermione reluctantly nodded. "I'm surprised you remember."

"Aside from the fact that Sevvu has mentioned him more than once as well as his Aunt Laine, it's hard to forget the name of the lawyer whose name was emblazoned on our divorce papers." H.J. shook his head in disbelief. "You let Regulus Black handle your side of the divorce?"

"He's not Regulus Black anymore, and I didn't know who else to turn to." Hermione stared pointedly at the sofa. "Sit down."

H.J. grudgingly did so. "Tell me."

"I fled to Luna's when I left as you know. And then I moved into a small apartment after a few months, and one day I was taking care of Luna's boys when she turned up with our daughter in tow." Hermione could still recall the feeling of relief and joy she'd felt at seeing Cammie. "One thing led to another, and it was Dae who ended up handling the divorce."

"So not only do your children know about Cammie and Regulus, but Luna and Xander knew all this time as well?" H.J. felt let down.

"Yes, but the children only know them as Laine and Dae, and not who they were." Hermione decided that she may as well come clean. "Buffy and Sheldon also know."

"You've got quite the hidden community going on." H.J.'s voice reflected his hurt.

"H.J., I wanted to tell you. I really did." Hermione placed a hand on H.J.'s arm. "Buffy only knows because Xander persuaded Cammie, or should I say Laine as she calls herself now, that Buffy would understand."

"Because of Angel." It was more of a statement than a question. H.J. dropped his head for a moment into his hands, before looking up. "How did Luna find out?"

"It was just a chance meeting. Luna ran into Laine in the market. Short of causing a scene, Laine listened to Luna who offered her support." Hermione explained. "Over the next six months we all got to know Dae better, and both Luna and I offered our support in helping him settle down into a Muggle existence."

H.J. found his former wife's words hard to accept; that she'd actually helped Regulus. "But he was Seville's right hand man."

"And he was my daughter's husband; the man she loves." Hermione countered. "I thought I'd lost her once, and I wasn't willing to let her go again, even if it meant accepting Dae."

"And do you like him?" H.J. wondered how Hermione really felt about the former Death Eater.

"Very much." Hermione couldn't lie. "They spend a lot over here, and I spend almost as much time with them at their home."

A thought occurred to H.J. at Hermione's comment. "Do you usually see them over Christmas?"

Hermione confirmed that she did. "Usually Laine and Dae come here with the children on Christmas Day, as do Luna and Xander if they aren't spending Christmas with Severus and Lavinia."

"I'll go." H.J. realized his daughter wasn't going to turn up because of him.

"H.J., please don't." Hermione knew how disappointed Sevvv would be, as this would be the first time her son had spent Christmas with

both of his parents since he was a small child. "Xander and Luna are spending Christmas Day with Dae and Laine instead, that's why they came here today instead of tomorrow."

H.J. dropped his head into his hands again, his voice thick with emotion. "I really fucked things up didn't I? I really should go. You can go visit Cammie." H.J. couldn't bring himself to call his daughter 'Laine', as Hermione was doing.

"H.J., please don't go." Hermione placed a tentative hand on his shoulder. "This means so much to Sevvv to have both of us together at Christmas, and Laine understood that."

"Then I'll stay." H.J. stood up, his eyes looking suspiciously wet.

Something Hermione noticed, and she felt a sharp pang of dismay, and she moved forward, sliding her arms around H.J.'s waist. "I'm really sorry."

H.J. tightened the embrace, needing the comfort his former wife was giving him. Then, knowing he'd break down if he remained where he was, he freed himself from her arms. "It's okay, I understand." He leant forward and kissed her cheek. "I'd better go to my room. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, H.J." Hermione sat down shakily as H.J. left, her heart pounding. Even though she'd hugged H.J. purely out of concern for him, when he'd held her, she'd found herself hoping that he'd kiss her. Punching a cushion into shape, she angrily berated herself. "He's obviously not interested, and he's angry with you right now, so don't even go there, Hermione." Getting up, she switched the light off, and headed to bed.

Almost Two Years Later

Despite Xander's words to him about Hermione still liking him, H.J. hadn't seen any indication that she was interested, and he'd backed off, and had settled for just being her friend. Now he and Hermione were standing outside Artie's new school, having just delivered the

young boy for his first day, and H.J. put his arm around Hermione as she sniffled. "Hey, he's going to be fine."

"But he's still so young." Hermione had been the same with Sevvv and Billie, when they'd first left for school. "You're lucky. You didn't have to go through this as all three of yours went to Hogwarts, and you were there."

"I'm glad I didn't." H.J. smiled at Luna, who too was in tears. "David will be fine. He's got Artie to keep him company, and the Conservatory is right on your doorstep."

"I know but it's hard. None of them has ever been away like this before." Luna wasn't just upset about David's starting school. The last six months had been a difficult time in the Harris household. Luna and Xander had had to explain to their two older children why they had been denied the same chance David had been given, and for a while things hadn't run smoothly, as the couple had had to deal with Matthew and Christian's disappointment. A disappointment that was made harder to bear when they'd learnt that it wasn't just David, but also Mara and Claire who too would be attending a magical school, only for them it would be the Salem's Girls' School near Boston. Learning that Cammie's children were exactly the same as them had been the balm that had eventually helped the two older boys deal with their discontent.

"I suppose we'd better get going. We're taking these two out to lunch, and then over to Alcatraz yet again." Luna smiled up at her non-magical sons, who both now towered over her. Cammie was looking after their two girls, so that Luna and Xander could spend a little time alone with the boys.

"Have a nice lunch." H.J. and Hermione then kissed Luna, shook hands with Xander, and hugged both boys before the family walked off towards their car. H.J. glanced around. "Can we apparate? My leg is killing me."

"Of course." Hermione also checked, and they both vanished.

Back at her home, Hermione found Billie waiting for her. "How did it go?"

"I cried." Hermione admitted to her daughter. "Are you packed and ready to go?"

"Nearly." Billie was returning to the Academy for her final year the next day, together with Sevvv and H.J. "I'm going for a walk in the park with Sevvv."

Hermione made herself and H.J. a cup of tea. "It's going to be quiet around here with just Molly."

"Will you collect her tonight?" H.J. knew that, like Luna's girls, Molly was staying with Cammie, but he had no idea where.

"No, tomorrow." Hermione didn't want things to be awkward by going to collect her daughter while H.J. was still there. "After you all leave."

"No luck in changing Cammie's mind?" H.J. had asked several times if Cammie would agree to see him, but she'd always refused.

"I'm sorry." Hermione abruptly changed the subject, and they spent the rest of the day talking about the coming school year, and what H.J. had planned.

26th December 2028

When he arrived that morning, H.J. had no idea that as from that evening, his life was going to change for the better. Aware that she'd been rushed off her feet with a house full the day before, he offered to pay for pizza to save Hermione from cooking, with all four children seconding his offer.

"I'll get it. That will be the pizzas." On hearing the doorbell, H.J. headed off to answer the door, only to stand transfixed when he opened it.

"Hello, Dad." Cammie stood shivering on the doorstep, both from nerves and cold.

H.J. didn't hesitate and drew Cammie into a bear hug. "I'm sorry. I'm so very, very sorry."

Cammie started to cry with H.J., neither of them noticing Molly, who'd followed H.J. out.

Molly trotted back into the sitting room. "Mum, Aunt Laine and Dad are crying." She'd started calling H.J. that the previous summer, when she'd been upset that she didn't have a dad like everyone else in her primary school class, and she didn't really remember Charlie at all. After talking it over, Hermione had agreed to it, when H.J. had said that he didn't mind, particularly as he'd grown close to the young girl, his visits having increased from once a month to two or three times a month, and it was he who had accompanied Molly to a Christmas father/daughter night a few days earlier, before he'd left to allow Cammie to visit on Christmas Day as she normally did.

At her daughter's words, Hermione almost broke the land speed record as she ran to the door, her own eyes filling with tears at the sight. Cammie heard the muffled sob and lifted her head, opening her arms to Hermione as well.

One by one each child filed into the lobby, wondering what was going on as H.J. and Hermione cried with their aunt. Sevvie waited until the trio broke apart to ask the obvious, frightened that something had gone wrong. "What's going on, Mum? Is someone hurt?"

"Everyone's fine, Sevvie." Hermione assured her son, before meeting her daughter's eyes, and when Cammie nodded, she told him the truth. "This is going to be hard to hear, but Laine is more than just your aunt, Sevvie, she's your sister."

Sevvie thought his mother's announcement was an understatement. "Why didn't you tell me that I had another sister?"

"Because I'm not exactly another sister, I'm Cammie." Cammie wiped her eyes with a tissue she fished out of her pocket.

Sevvy was having trouble grasping what he was hearing. "But Cammie ran away with a Death Eater. You can't be her."

Billie gasped. "I thought you were joking when you told me that, and it was just family gossip."

Cammie shook her head. "It's true. He was Sam's father and I couldn't give him up."

"So how did you meet Dae?" Billie asked, not making the connection.

Cammie filled her in. "Dae is Sam's father."

Sevvy stood and stared in horror at his sister as the truth about who Dae really was hit him. "Dae is Regulus Black?"

"Yes." Cammie called out as Sevvy turned and fled. "Sevvy, please wait."

"I'll go after him." Billie then turned and followed Sevvy's path up the stairs, the sound of a door slamming telling her where he'd run to.

"Shut the front door." Hermione told Artie just as the pizzas turned up. Paying for them herself, she dumped them on the kitchen counter before following everyone into the sitting room.

Artie and Molly weren't quite so bothered about what was happening, so Molly asked. "Can I have pizza, Mum?"

"Artie, go and eat with your sister in the family room." Hermione ordered, and she turned her attention to her former husband and daughter.

H.J. was sitting down, holding his daughter's hand, comforting her as she was upset over Sevvy's reaction. "Sevvy will get over it. It's just been something of a shock for him. Growing up, he's the one who knows how much I was upset over your disappearance, and the one who listened to me blaming Regulus. I never hid the truth from him about where you'd gone, or with whom you'd gone. And when you

refused to see me, I never expected for him to ever learn the truth about who you really were."

"Dad, I wanted to tell you where I was so many times but I was too scared." Cammie had changed her mind about seeing H.J. after listening to Molly babble on about how much she loved her new 'Dad'. Cammie's sense of loss had grown, and after talking things over with Regulus, he'd supported her when she'd told him that she was going to make contact with H.J.

"After what I did to you, I'm not surprised you didn't tell me." H.J. took the blame from his daughter. "I drove you away."

"I'd have left no matter what you did." Cammie took the blame back. "I wanted to be with Dae."

"I should never have used you to entrap him." H.J. apologized to his daughter. "Sirius, Harry and myself; we all regretted it. Me more than anyone else."

"I've long gotten over it, and Dae made me see that you were all just doing your jobs. So I forgive you, all of you." Cammie gave H.J. the absolution he'd badly wanted. "Can you forgive me?"

"There's nothing to forgive, Cammie." H.J. put his arms around his daughter, just wanting to hold her. "You just wanted to be with the man you loved."

"Thank you for understanding." Cammie was in tears again, as she let H.J. hold her, just as he had done when she'd been a small child. "Because that was all I ever wanted. And even knowing what he was, I love Dae more than anything, Dad, and I wouldn't want to be without him."

"And does he love you as much?" H.J. released Cammie so that she could sit up.

"Dad, more than you know." Cammie swallowed, and revealed the reason why Luna had agreed to get to know Regulus better. 'Dad, he's the one who made my first kill for me. He polyjuiced himself to

look like me, rather than have me fail and Thomas punish me. And even though they were friends, Thomas would have punished Dae for deceiving him, maybe even killed him."

H.J. was only too aware what he believed would have happened if Thomas had found out, and his dislike of Regulus wavered for the first time. "He must really love you then."

"He does, Dad." Cammie continued. "But that's not all he's done for me. When Thomas offered him a chance to have his magic back, he refused because I didn't want it."

"He refused?" H.J., like everyone else, had believed that Regulus would have taken someone's life and their magic. Luna had been unable to tell him otherwise because of her oath to Cammie.

"Yes. Dad, I thought Mum would have told you." Cammie glanced at her mother.

"I couldn't tell him." Hermione reminded Cammie of her own oath, not to tell anyone where her daughter was, and she had therefore not told H.J. that Cammie now lived as a Muggle. "Even if I'd wanted to."

"Mum, I didn't think." Cammie apologized to her mother. "Sorry."

"It's okay." Hermione assured her daughter, as H.J. turned his attention back to Cammie. "So do you live as Muggles?"

"Yes, just like Luna and Xander." Cammie barely gave her non-magical existence a thought, and tonight had been the first time she'd used magic in more than six months.

"And does he take good care of you and the children?" H.J., like any father, wanted only the best for his daughter, even now.

"Dad, Dae's a wonderful husband and father, and I only have to mention I want something, and he gets it for me." Cammie's face softened as she talked about her husband. "He once drove all the way to Santa Barbara because I broke my snow globe to buy me another one, because he knew how much I loved it. And the children

adore him. He always tries to make sure that he's home on time from work every day, to help them with their homework, to play with them, or just to simply say hello. Obviously that doesn't always pan out, but it isn't for lack of trying." Cammie wiped away her tears which had started again at the memories. "Dad, Dae's the best father and husband I could have ever wished for, and he means the world to me."

"And she means the world to me." Worried about his wife, Regulus hadn't been able to stay away, and leaving Sam in charge of his siblings, had come after his wife just moments after she'd apparated out.

H.J. stood up. He knew he could kill the man in front of him as he had no defenses; no way of fighting back. Instead he held out his hand. "H.J. Sebastian."

"Dae McMillan." Regulus shook H.J.'s hand before pulling Cammie up and holding her against him, kissing her as he felt her shaking. "It's going to be okay, Laine."

H.J. couldn't miss the unadulterated look of love the two shared; the same look he'd seen Xander and Luna sharing two Christmases earlier, and he knew in that moment that he'd never betray his daughter's trust, and tell anyone where she was. He couldn't do it to her. "He's right. It will be okay. And I give you my word that I won't be telling anyone that you're here."

Cammie smiled tremulously at her father. "Thanks, Dad."

"Thank you." Regulus also thanked H.J., but he went on further. "H.J., I want, no I need you to know, that I'm not proud of what I was, but I can't change my past, and it's something I'll have to live with for the rest of my life. But I love your daughter, and my children, and as surprising as it sounds, I wouldn't want my magic back. I'm content to live the life I'm living." He became thoughtful. "If I'd known what it was like to live as a Muggle, I'd like to think that I wouldn't have been the arrogant pureblood I once was."

H.J. understood where Dae was coming from. "I wish some of the kids in Slytherin could hear you saying that. After Dumbledore and Seville's deaths I believed that relationships between different blood factions would improve. That things would get better with Muggleborns being allowed to attend Hogwarts without the threat of ostracisation hanging over their heads. And while it's true that they're no longer pushed to the sidelines, instead Slytherin has become like the Slytherin of my world was; a bastion for purebloods, and that's despite Severus' best efforts to change his house. And as much as I hate to say it, your former friend's daughter, Madison, is the perfect example of a perfect pureblood Slytherin."

Even though he no longer lived in the wizarding world, Regulus was only too well aware of what she was like. "I had the, err, pleasure, of meeting Madison Seville briefly again a few days ago, although she doesn't remember who I once was."

H.J. gave a tight smile as he thought about Thomas' eldest daughter. "Despite Mione, Lucy, and Remus' best efforts, she's definitely the product of her father and the new school system. Thankfully Bella hasn't turned out like her sister." H.J. returned to Dae's comment about coming into contact with Madison. "How did you meet Madison?"

"As I'm sure you already know, I'm a lawyer, and the company I work for is part of the Seville Corporation." Regulus revealed. "Madison's in town doing a review of all of the employees, and I met her when she came into the office to begin that review."

H.J. decided to give Regulus a heads up. "Then I suggest you steer clear of work tomorrow. Lucy Potter heads her division, and she's going to be in town for a few days, together with Siri Black, Madison's direct boss. I doubt they'll be as forgiving as I am."

Cammie smiled, her walls breaking down even more as her father warned her husband. "We know. Mum has already told us. How did you know?"

H.J. could see he'd just earned himself some brownie points with his daughter. "I told them I was spending Christmas and New Year in town, and they're coming here to dinner on the 28th."

"Thanks for the warning, but I'm not worried about them being here. I won't run into my nephew or Lucy, as I'm a senior member of staff, and don't fall under the review process. And Lucy is already aware of my presence here; she's the one who dealt with all the paperwork for my transformation from Regulus Black to Dae McMillan." Regulus revealed yet another person in the know about him and Cammie.

"She kept that quiet." H.J. remarked, wondering just how many others knew.

"She swore an oath to do so to protect Laine and Sam, and not me; they're actually still very good friends." Regulus revealed. "She also attended our wedding and all of our children's baptisms. In fact, she's Thomas' godmother."

"You named him after Seville, didn't you?" Hermione had told H.J. that much.

"Yes." Regulus didn't deny it. "He was my best friend, and although I'm well aware that that doesn't sit well with you, I can't change it."

"I'd only be concerned if he was still alive, but he's not." H.J. assured Regulus. "And you're obviously no longer the man you once were."

"No, I'm not." Regulus had to admit that that was true. "H.J., I don't expect for us to become friends overnight, but I'd like it if we could at least try to have some sort of congenial relationship, for Laine's and the children's sakes."

"I agree we should try." H.J. wasn't entirely sure he was thrilled at the thought but he was unwilling to alienate his daughter just after she'd issued an olive branch. "I have to be honest. It's strange to hear Cammie being called Laine."

"It was strange for us, as well, at first." Cammie admitted. "Up until Sam was old enough to speak, we still called each other by our real

names but it would have been too confusing for him, and the others, so we got used to using our new ones."

"Do your children know who Hermione really is?" H.J. thought about Sevv's reaction earlier.

"They don't actually know that Cammie is her daughter but they do call her 'Nanna'." Regulus informed him. "I think that after tonight that may have to change." He glanced at his wristwatch, the same one Cammie had given him years earlier for his birthday. "Now, if you'll excuse us, even though Sam's old enough to take care of his siblings, I still don't want to leave them alone for too much longer, and it's a fifteen minute drive home, if I don't break the speed limit as I did to get here."

"You drive?" H.J. blurted out.

"How else do you imagine I get around?" Regulus smiled, and let go of Cammie so she could hug H.J. and Hermione, Regulus himself hugging Hermione. "And in the spirit of getting to you know better, if you're not doing anything on New Year's Eve, Hermione and the children are coming over, and we'd both like it if you'd come as well."

H.J. knew that even if he had been doing something else, he'd have changed it for the opportunity to meet his grandchildren. "I'll be there."

After the couple left, H.J. poured himself a scotch, as he tried to get over his shock. After a few minutes, he noticed the silence. "The children are awfully quiet."

"Dammit." Hermione opened the family room door to find both Archie and Molly watching a movie she'd banned them from seeing for being too violent. "Get changed for bed both of you, right now. And you're grounded for a week for disobeying me about the movie."

"Mum, is Aunt Laine okay?" Molly asked, more concerned about her Aunt than her punishment.

"She's fine, Molly." Hermione headed back into the sitting room. "I suppose we'd better check on the other two as well." Making their way upstairs, Hermione and H.J. could hear soft music playing and voices coming from Sevv's room. "On second thoughts, perhaps we should leave Billie to talk to him. I've had enough drama for one night."

"I agree." After going back downstairs, H.J. spent the rest of the evening talking with Hermione about their daughter, before she left to go to bed.

Several hours later H.J. headed upstairs as well, catching the sound of soft voices still coming from Sevv's room. Knocking on the door, H.J. put his head around it to tell them to keep it down, only to be stunned at the sight that met his eyes. "What the hell is going on?"

"Fuck." Sevv swore.

"I'm still waiting for explanation." H.J. was not happy to find his son and Hermione's daughter in bed together. "And it had better be good."

"We're in love." Billie didn't know what else to say.

H.J. ran a hand over his face. "Great. Cammie and Harry all over again."

"What?" Sevv didn't get it.

"Harry Potter was once in love with your sister. Cammie was adopted by me and your Mum but her original mother was Harry's aunt." H.J. explained his comment briefly. "Although at least they were only cousins, and not brother and sister."

"Billie is not my sister, Dad." Sevv quite correctly pointed out. "Mum is only her guardian, even though she sees Mum as her mum."

H.J. didn't care about the logistics; he was too angry with both children. "Sevv, you're sleeping in my room. UP."

"I'm not dressed." Sevvv winced at the even angrier look that crossed his father's face before H.J. turned his back. After dragging his robe on, Sevvv smiled reassuringly at Billie. "Don't worry, everything will be alright."

Billie pulled the sheet tighter around herself as Sevvv headed past his father, and H.J. clipped Sevvv around the head as he left the room, before turning to face Billie. "I'll be talking to your mother in the morning."

"What's wrong with now?" Still awake, Hermione had heard raised voices and had gotten up to investigate.

H.J. grabbed Sevvv's arm as the young man tried to make a hasty exit. "I've just found our son and your daughter in bed together."

Hermione was horrified. "Sevvv?"

"I love her, Mum." Sevvv began to defend himself against his mother. "And before you say anything, she's not really my sister."

"Oh God. It's Harry and Cammie all over again." Hermione repeated H.J. had just said.

"Dad's already told us." Sevvv pulled free from his Dad's grasp and walked back over to the bed, sitting down and putting his arm around his girlfriend. "Billie's been my girlfriend since we were fifteen, and when we finish the Academy next year, we're going to get married. I know we should have told you sooner, but it never seemed to be the right time, and tonight certainly wasn't it."

"Oh God." Hermione started to cry.

H.J. put his arm around his former wife. "Sevvv, escort Billie back to Molly's room. I do not want to find her in here again. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Sir." Sevvv recognized his father's tone as one not to be messed with.

H.J. led Hermione to her bedroom. "Shh."

"Why didn't I notice?" Hermione sobbed against H.J.'s shoulder.

"I didn't notice either." H.J. rubbed her back. "But Sevvy's right. They're not related."

"I know but I'm afraid one of them will get hurt, and they're both my children." Hermione lifted her head. "I've tried so hard since Charlie died to do the right thing. But it's been so hard on my own."

"You're not alone with this one." H.J. assured her. "Sevvy's my son as well."

Hermione, however, wasn't finished. "And I was so afraid this evening when Dae showed up that you'd hurt him, and... and..." Hermione couldn't go on.

H.J. pulled her closer, kissing her forehead. "It's going to be alright."

"But I wanted everything to be perfect for you." Hermione could barely get her words out.

"Why?" H.J. couldn't understand why Hermione had gotten so rattled. "It's not the first time I've stayed here."

Between her sobs, she told him. "I know that but Sevvy said that your rooms were always beautifully decorated at Christmas. And that Jessica was the sort of person who made sure you had matching towels, that the dinner table was always perfect, and your Christmas decorations were just so." Hermione held onto H.J.'s shirt even tighter as she cried all the more. "After that first Christmas hadn't gone right because you found out about Laine, I wanted to make this time special. But I broke some of the dinner plates so they didn't match, and I ruined yet another batch of towels with bleach."

H.J. smiled despite the evening they'd had. "Hermione, I hated every minute of Jessica's perfection. So I don't care if my towel had a bleach stain on it, it still did the job. And I didn't get to see the dinner plates as we were having pizza and I doubt I'd have even noticed that

they didn't match, if we had used them, and you could have magically repaired them."

"But I'd have known." Hermione wailed. "And the children smashed some of the decorations beyond repair that I'd hung when they were playing catch by the tree."

H.J. couldn't help but smile even more. "The children are just being children. I think it's wonderful that they feel relaxed enough around you to be so carefree. When they were growing up, the boys were always afraid to go by the tree in case they were shouted at by Jess."

"But I still wanted it to be just right." Hermione wasn't consoled by H.J.'s words. "And now with Sevvie and Billie, Laine and Dae, and my stupid mistakes, it's all gone wrong."

"Hermione, look at me." H.J. said gently.

"I'm blotchy." Hermione knew how awful crying made her look.

"Look at me." H.J. repeated. As Hermione lifted her head to look at him, he cupped her face. "You are beautiful even when you've been crying, and just holding you in my arms makes everything right." H.J. could see the tears glistening on her eyelashes he was so close to her. "I've wanted to tell you this for so long now. I love you."

Some of the tears fell away as Hermione closed her eyes as H.J.'s mouth covered hers.

As the kiss ended, H.J. repeated his words. "Hermione, I love you, I always have loved you, and I always will love you." He smiled gently. "And judging by how upset you are over things not going the way you wanted, am I right in thinking you feel the same way about me?"

Hermione's tears began to flow freely again as she nodded. "Yes. I realized that I still loved you when you agreed to let Molly call you 'Dad' but I thought you didn't feel the same way, and that you just wanted to be my friend."

"I should have made it more obvious." H.J. didn't care that Hermione was crying, and he began to kiss her again. "Hermione, I'm never going to let you go again."

"I don't want you to." Hermione felt as though she'd come home. "Will you stay with me tonight?"

"Every night." H.J. promised, and he slowly began to undress her.

Her hands shaking with nerves, Hermione began to do the same to him. "H.J., I love you."

"And I love you." H.J. repeated, as he lay down beside her on the bed once they were both naked. Running his hand over Hermione's breasts and down over her stomach, he paid her a compliment. "You're beautiful, Hermione."

"I've had three children, H.J." Suddenly feeling exposed, and aware that her body wasn't as firm as it once was, Hermione tried to cover herself up.

"You're still beautiful." H.J. wasn't put off by the small amount of extra flesh that Hermione now possessed, and he lifted her hands off her stomach and up to his mouth, and kissed both of them. "In fact, I'd say you were just perfect."

As Hermione relaxed at H.J.'s words, the two began to kiss and caress each other, slowly at first, and then as their hunger for each other grew, with unrestrained passion. Finally H.J. moved over Hermione, and conscious that it had been a while since Hermione had last made love, he slowly entered her, kissing her until he found himself unable to go any further, and he told her yet again how much he felt about her. "I love you so much."

"No more than I love you." Hermione murmured as H.J. began to make love to the woman his heart had never been able to truly forget.

December 28th 2028

As it turned out due to an emergency cropping up, Lucy cancelled her visit, and it was therefore only Siri Black who found himself congratulating H.J. and Hermione on their newly announced engagement, H.J. having asked Hermione to marry him again after they'd finished making love.

As they ate dinner, H.J. asked how things were going with Maddie. Siri pulled a face. "I've been working with her for two years now, and after the first five minutes I was ready to cut my own wrists. 'Don't call me 'Maddie'. My name is Madison.'" Siri mocked what the girl had said to him.

H.J. grinned. "So I take it you've heard her favorite line 'if my father were alive...'?"

"I'd have kept count but I don't think there are enough numbers." Siri's face reflected his dislike of the girl.

Hermione was a little dismayed by the men's conversation. "She can't be that bad. I remember her as being a sweet child."

Siri disagreed. "She makes a viper look friendly."

H.J. laughed out loud. "So she's not in your little black book?"

Having been teased by both H.J. and Harry Sebastian, Siri was aware of the Muggle euphemism. "If I woke up next to her, I'd chew my own arm off."

Even though she knew that Sevvie didn't like Madison, Billie still gasped at Siri's virulence. "That's a bit rude."

Sevvie, unlike Billie who hadn't attended Hogwarts, remembered Madison from school. "Hardly. By the time I started Hogwarts, she was already a potential queen bee for Slytherin. Daddy's money and her pureblood status went a long way towards that."

Siri backed up his former school friend. "And she's had a chip on her shoulder for as long as I can remember."

H.J. could remember further back than Siri. "She didn't used to be like that, but she always adored her father, and his death hit her harder than anyone else. She changed literally overnight, and retreated into herself. Then she was sent away to Hogwarts, and not Berowra, which I think might have made a difference but Mione didn't want her in Australia. Once she made Slytherin, as Sevvv just said, her status as an extremely rich pureblood opened doors much faster to the top than otherwise would have been the case. She had a circle of elite friends by the end of the first month she was there, and not just first years."

Hermione hadn't heard this before, as Sevvv had only ever pulled a face when she'd asked about Maddie, and said he couldn't stand her; never bothering to explain why. And Luna had only ever said that Maddie was a polite if standoffish kind of girl, not really having much contact with her. "So what happened after that?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary per se." H.J. thought back. "She was always top of her year though, and she even topped some of Cassandra's scores, but not all. As you might expect, she excelled at potions and transfiguration, and her marks for defense were the highest scores ever recorded. After leaving school at sixteen, she went to the London Business School, and took studies in both the magical and Muggle sections, finishing top of her year in both, and then attended Oxford University. When she was twenty-two she started at the Seville Corporation."

"I'm just glad that I started before her." Siri, like Madison, had left Hogwarts one year early, but unlike her, he'd moved to work at the Seville Corporation under Remus, something Sirius hadn't been happy about, but Remus had talked him around. Subsequently, and despite being a year behind Madison at Hogwarts, Siri had moved up the ranks far quicker than Madison, whose mother had refused to act on nepotism and had made Madison start down the employee ladder after she'd finished her schooling at Oxford. "Because it means I'm her boss, at least for the moment."

"It must be good to tell her what to do." Sevvv's comment did nothing to hide his dislike of the Seville heir. "Is she still dating Damien Malfoy?"

"On and off." Siri didn't particularly like the Malfoy heir, who had been taken in by Bella and Craig after his mother had been incarcerated in New Azkaban. "And his attitude is worse than hers."

"Being an international quidditch star does tend to do that to people." H.J. had had the misfortune to meet some of Damien's teammates at a new year's party Sirius had held. "They're of the opinion that women are there for their amusement."

"Damien Malfoy was a git before then. Even when he was seeing Madison at school he was sleeping around behind her back. And that was before he became famous for playing for the Los Angeles Lightspeeds." Siri mentioned the American quidditch team his cousin had joined as a result of his attending the wizarding section of UCLA to study American politics, something he'd dropped in favor of playing quidditch.

Hermione recalled something Sevvv had mentioned before. "Well I still think you're being extremely unkind about her. Isn't Madison best friends with your sister, Callie?"

Siri's face softened at the mention of his younger sister, who had actually married Madison's brother, Nathaniel, almost four years earlier. "Callie is an absolute angel, and I was horrified when she was sorted into Slytherin. I was surprised when, as they were several years apart at Hogwarts, Madison brought her into her circle. I'm just relieved that Callie kept her sweet nature but I still don't see why she's friends with Madison. She's tried to tell me on more than occasion how nice Madison really is, but somehow I'm not buying it. Callie just likes to think well of everyone."

Hermione had been invited to Callie's wedding, but still in mourning over Charlie, and unable to deal with the idea of seeing H.J., she had refused to go. "I have to be honest. I was surprised when she married Nat."

"You're not alone." Siri had been stunned when his sister had first said she was dating Nathaniel. "But when I asked her why, she told me that she didn't care that he'd never be able to balance a Muggle

check book or that he'd never have a clue which fork to use at dinner. All that she cared about was that he's a beautiful person, and had picked her. She said she was lucky."

"Callie's really nice." Sevvv himself had had a crush on the slightly older girl, before he'd fallen for Billie. "And so is Nat. I think they make a lovely couple." Sevvv, unlike his mother, had attended the wedding with H.J. "And I have to admit that even though she's a bitch, Madison loves her brother, and ripped into a guest who she overheard disparaging Nat's stumbling attempt at a speech at the wedding. And she adores Harriet Potter; they're almost as close as Nat and Madison are."

"Perhaps Madison isn't as bad as you're making out then." Hermione still wouldn't let herself believe she was.

"I'll tell you what." Siri exchanged a knowing smirk with Sevvv. "Invite her to dinner tomorrow night."

"Okay then." Hermione was interested in seeing how Mione and Thomas' daughter had turned out.

"Then I'm out of here." Billie wasn't willing to sit through the dinner with Madison Seville, especially not after what Sevvv had told her.

"We'll go to Aunt Laine and Uncle Dae's place." Sevvv suggested, his dismay at Dae had faded when Cammie had come over the previous day, and had spent most of the day just talking to her brother, using Billie as an example of what it was like to fall in love with someone you shouldn't have. He was still calling Cammie 'Aunt Laine' though, through sheer force of habit. After Cammie had left, he and Billie had had to sit through a talk with their parents, resulting in their begrudgingly receiving their blessing to the marriage that Sevvv had mentioned.

"Hold on. Uncle Dae isn't Dae McMillan, is he?" Siri recalled seeing that the Managing Partner was named Dae from the employee records when he'd been reviewing them with Madison, before she'd left ahead of him to begin the reviews, and it wasn't exactly a common name.

"Yes." Sevvv had forgotten he wasn't supposed to mention them in front of Siri, Hermione having removed all traces of her daughter's photos from the house.

"I'm sure I recall Madison saying that I wouldn't get to meet him as he'd call in sick to say that he was coming down with the Muggle flu." Siri wondered if the man was playing hooky.

"He does have it." Sevvv covered his tracks up smoothly. "But I'd rather catch that than sit through dinner with Madison. Sorry mate."

Siri pulled a face at his friend. "If only I could be so lucky."

"Then you shouldn't have suggested it." Hermione chided him. However Siri was about to be cut a break as H.J.'s cell phone rang. "Yes?"

"Harry, hi." H.J. listened, before his face split into a massive grin. "Congratulations. Are they all alright?" After listening to Harry's lengthy response, and then hanging up, H.J. passed on the news to those at the dinner table with him. "Cassandra went into labor early but she and the triplets are doing fine."

Harry and Cassandra already had one son, Orion Sirius, who was now six, who'd they adopted when he was two months old, but despite numerous attempts at IVF, until earlier that year, they'd had no luck conceiving naturally. But on their agreed final attempt, as Cassandra was now in her mid-forties, they had hit the jackpot when they'd announced that they were expecting not one, but three girls, the multiple births being a side effect of the treatment.

"Well, names, weights, how long was labor?" Being a woman, Hermione wanted more detail.

"They all weigh around 4lbs, and they're named Faith, Nia and Andra. And labor was over sixteen hours." H.J. shared a smile with Siri at Hermione's enthusiasm. "And they're going to be in St. Mungo's for the next few days. So I'm sorry, Siri, but that dinner will have to wait for some other time." H.J. decided. "I want to see my new nieces, and

I have to be back here on New Year's Eve for an important dinner date with my fiancée."

"Suits me." Siri was in no hurry to spend any time with Madison Seville, and he, like the others, began to make plans to visit his sister.

Next Chapter: We get one last look at Mione's, Harry's and H.J.'s lives before the epilogue.

Chapter 88: Wrapping Things Up

14th June 2031

It was more than three years later when Hermione Sebastian finally got her chance to talk properly to Madison, the young woman attending Sevvv and Billie's wedding. Contrary to what H.J., Sevvv and Siri had told her, she'd found her to be pleasant, and mentioned as much as she sat back down next to Siri, who'd acted as Sevvv's best man. "She's really nice, Siri."

"Don't let her congenial act fool you, Aunt Hermione." Siri had begun to use the appellation when H.J. had married Hermione less than a week after proposing, the wedding only being attended by those in the know about Cammie. They'd held a second ceremony for everyone else a month later, which Siri himself had attended. H.J. had subsequently given up his position at the Academy when the school year had ended, taking up a position at the Conservatory, to both Artie's and Hermione's joy, so that they could remain in San Francisco, close to Cammie and her family.

"Well, I'm going to find out more because I've invited her to dinner at our house next month when you'll both be in San Francisco again." Hermione informed him.

"You'll see." Siri warned her, and he got to his feet. "If you don't mind, I'm going to dance with my fiancée." Siri had gotten engaged to Barbara Baxter, a Muggle who worked as a receptionist in the Miami office of the Seville Corporation ten months earlier, and everyone adored the sweet, if somewhat timid girl.

"Go ahead." Hermione turned to her husband. "You didn't mind me asking them, did you?"

"As long as she doesn't bring her fiancé along." Madison had gotten engaged to Damien Malfoy just weeks before Siri had announced his own engagement.

"As she and Siri will be in town on business, I doubt either of them will be accompanied by their partners." Hermione glanced down the table at their children. "I hope this works out for them."

"They're as crazy about each other as I am about you." H.J. assured his wife. "Our children will do just fine."

Harry made his way up to the table and sat down beside Hermione in Siri's vacated seat. He had been overjoyed when he'd learnt about the couple getting back together three years earlier. "I can feel your disapproval from across the room, H.J. Who's it aimed at now?"

"Madison." H.J. glanced over at his niece. "Hermione invited her to dinner next month."

Harry grimaced. "Just make sure to wear your Basilisk vest."

Hermione scowled. "Harry, you're as bad as my husband and Siri."

"Madison's a nightmare." Harry warned. "Remus and Mione have had their hands full ever since she was told about Thomas' death. Personally I'd have told her the truth, but they didn't want Madison's image of her father tarnished; I think she'd be a better person if they had been honest."

Remus, who was sitting a table away, could hear Harry's hushed conversation, and he excused himself and joined those at the top table. "I disagree."

Hermione hoped this wouldn't turn into an argument at her children's wedding. "I think there's a time and place for this conversation, and this isn't it."

Remus and Harry both apologized, before they both left to rejoin their spouses.

Later than night, Remus brought up what he'd overheard. "Harry still thinks we should have told Madison the truth about Thomas."

Mione sighed as she curled up to her husband. "And I still disagree. It was hard enough for her to lose Thomas without having to lose the perfect image she had of him."

"That's what I believe as well." Remus had backed his wife's decision. "It all seems so long ago now though."

"That's because it is." Mione trailed her fingers through Remus' chest hair, which despite his turning 70 the year previously, was still relatively unmarred by grey. "Sometimes it all seems like nothing more than a bad dream."

"If only it had been." Remus kissed Mione's ear, unable to reach her cheek. "But it's all turned out well in the end."

"For us, maybe." Mione thought about Lucy Potter. "I wish Lucy could have found someone."

"It's not as if she hasn't dated." Remus and Mione were both close to Lucy, as were the Potters and the Sevvilles, who were both now in their nineties. "She's just never met the right person."

"She did but he died." Mione always believed that Harry Potter had been the right person for Lucy, just as Cassandra had been the right person for Harry Sebastian. "At least she's got Harriet."

Remus was as close to Harriet as he was to all of his and Mione's children, the young girl spending lots of time with them as she'd grown up; his, Mione's and Lucy's lives meshing as all three had taken on the challenge of running the Seville Corporation, Remus resigning his post as Head of the Watchers' Council in order to do so. "She's an absolute angel. She reminds me a little of Callie."

"Me too." Mione loved her daughter-in-law, who'd given birth to their first grandson, Nathaniel Junior, eighteen months earlier. "I always worried about her and Nat making it work, but I think the fact that they're both artists, and both have a heart of gold that makes it right."

Nat had overcome many of his difficulties, but still found it hard to function in crowds, as his difficult speech at his own wedding had

proved, but Mione and Remus were proud of what he had accomplished, and he was already a renowned artist in the Muggle world, even at such young age. "They love each other." Remus believed that love was a key factor in making a marriage work. "And they work hard at their marriage, just as we do."

"You haven't exactly made it hard for me." Mione had felt blessed that Remus had stuck with her through thick and thin over the years. "You tell me you love me every day."

"That's because I do love you." Remus kissed her ear again.

"And I love you." Mione yawned and closed her eyes. "Sorry, but it's been a very long day."

"I'll switch off the light." Remus reached across, and tapped the light, plunging the room into semi-darkness, and he settled down next to his wife to reflect on his marriage. They'd married six months after Thomas' execution, neither wanting to be seen as doing anything that could be regarded as distasteful so soon after Thomas' death. And the only thing that marred Remus and Mione's married life was the fact that Remus had never marked her. While neither of them ever discussed it, both of them knew that although Mione loved Remus unrestrainedly, it wasn't the same kind of love she'd once had for Thomas; the kind of love that Remus had for Mione.

And for her part, Mione wished that she could love Remus as she'd once loved Thomas, but as she'd said to Harry when the subject had come up, that sort of love comes but once a lifetime, and for her it had been with Thomas. However, she did love Remus, and was grateful for every minute they had together.

Several doors down, a similar conversation about Madison Seville was ongoing between Harry and Cassandra, Harry having told Cassandra what he'd discussed when he'd returned to their table. "So do you think they're right about Madison?"

"I don't know." Cassandra had always sat on the fence. "Perhaps she'd still be the same person she is even if they had told her."

"Well it's a little late now. Her character is well and truly formed, and I can only imagine how happy Daddy would have been at the thought of her marrying a pureblood like Malfoy. They most definitely deserve one another." Harry didn't like to admit it but he didn't particularly like his niece, even though he had made every effort to overcome his dislike.

"That's a little harsh." Cassandra couldn't stand her cousin. "Damien is rotten to the core but Madison isn't quite so bad."

Harry snorted. "I have to disagree. You should have heard how rude she was about Siri's engagement to Barb because she's a Muggle."

"Harry, do you think Siri's doing the right thing marrying her?" Cassandra liked Barbara but she wasn't entirely sure she was the right choice for her brother. "And I'm not saying it because she's a Muggle."

"I know that." Harry was only too well aware that his wife wasn't prejudiced against Muggles in the slightest, unlike his niece. "And no, I don't think she's the right woman for him. She's far too introverted, and Siri needs someone with a little more fire."

"So why do you think he's marrying her?" Cassandra questioned her husband.

"He thinks he loves her." Harry climbed into bed.

"She loves him though, doesn't she?" Cassandra had seen the loving looks Barbara had bestowed upon her fiancé.

"Without a doubt." Harry turned off the light, and curled up to Cassandra's back. "But I believe that your Dad's death has a lot to do with Siri's sudden desire to marry. He's gone 28 years as a single man, and then all of a sudden, after dating Barb for less than three months, and less than five months after your Dad's death, he asks her to marry him."

Sirius had died during a successful assassination attempt less than one week after Nat Junior's birth. Sevvv and Billie should have gotten

married then, but as a mark of respect they'd ended up postponing the wedding. Everyone in the wizarding world had been stunned and shocked at the well-liked Minister's death, and Harry had been the one to track down Sirius' killer, the son of Pansy Diggory, who'd lost not only his mother to New Azkaban, but also his father when Harry had executed him. When Harry had questioned William Diggory, he'd told Harry that he knew that Harry was unbeatable, and had hit back at him another way. Harry had ended up having to execute Diggory, when the new Minister, Susan Bones, had decreed that he should die by the killing curse.

"I hope that's not why Siri's doing it; because Dad is gone and he's feels its his duty." Cassandra sighed. "I miss Dad, Harry."

"So do I." Harry admitted. "And I think apart from Faith and you kids, that Lucy is probably the one who misses him most." In a strange turn of events, Lucy had forgiven Sirius for what he'd done, particularly once she'd a child of her own, and understood how powerful the love a parent had for a child was, and he'd subsequently become a mentor to her, as well as Harriet's godfather.

"We've lost too many people because of Seville, Harry. And not just Dad." Cassandra thought back over the years. "Orion, Neville, Alasdair, Harry, more friends than I can count from BritAD, and I suppose even Cammie. To say nothing of the fact that I almost lost you." Cassandra still had no idea that Cammie was in touch with her family. "I thought that when Seville died, that it would be over, but it's not, is it?"

"I hope it is now." Harry kissed his wife's neck. "But look at it this way, we've also gained a lot. I'd never have met you if it hadn't been for him, Mione wouldn't be with Remus, H.J. and Hermione wouldn't have gotten together, Sevvyy wouldn't exist, neither would Nathaniel Junior, we wouldn't have our children, and I could keep on going. And even though Madison is the biggest pain in the neck to ever walk the earth, she's still a blessing as far as Mione and Remus are concerned."

"I just wish we could all have met some other way." Cassandra swiveled around. "But if this is how it had to be, then I'm glad you came into my life. I love you."

"I love you too." Harry kissed Cassandra. "And I'd put up with a thousand Thomas Seattles if it meant that I had you in my life."

"I think you should kiss me and shut up." Cassandra told her husband.

"I think you mean shut up and kiss me." Harry teased.

"Whatever." Cassandra pulled Harry's head towards her, and silence fell upon the couple.

July 10th 2031

Hermione had still thought she'd been right about Madison. As she'd gotten the meal ready and had laid it out, Hermione had found the young woman had been absolutely charming until she mentioned Siri's wedding. "Have you set the date for your wedding yet?"

Siri shook his head. "No, things are a little hectic with work at the moment, but we'll get around to it eventually."

"I really think you could have found someone better, Siri. For goodness sake, the girl's a Muggle." Madison's disdain was reflected in her voice.

Siri flashed Hermione an 'I told you so' look before commenting. "You have a problem with that?"

"You're a pureblood, Siri, and you should be marrying a woman of the same standing." Madison shuddered. "Not a disgusting Muggle."

Siri had had enough of her wisecracks. And five years of listening to them had pushed him to the very edge of his limits. "I'd rather marry every Muggle on the planet than marry a stuck-up, arrogant, pureblood bitch like you."

Madison's head snapped back as if it had been struck. "How dare you speak to me like that?"

Hermione too was surprised at Siri's uncharacteristic outburst. "Siri, that was awfully rude."

"I apologize." Madison looked smug until Siri finished his sentence. "To Aunt Hermione. But I mean every word."

Madison fell back on one of her favorite threats. "I'm telling my Mother what you said."

"Be my guest." Siri pulled his cell phone out of his pocket and threw it across the table to her. "Go ahead. She should still be at the office."

Madison flipped open the phone and stared triumphantly at Siri as she waited for the phone to connect, before telling Mione what had gone on. She then smirked as she threw the phone back at Siri. "She wants to talk to you."

Siri listened for a moment. "I didn't say anything that we both know isn't true, Aunt Mione. And what your daughter failed to tell you is that she considers Barb, and every other Muggle, far beneath her and quote disgusting unquote." Siri threw the phone back at Madison after a few moments of listening to Mione at the other end. "It's for you."

Madison's face turned red as she listened to Mione. "But Mum..." She listened again. "Yes. Yes. I understand." Closing the phone, she threw it back at Siri. "I hate you."

Hermione didn't quite know how to react. "I think that perhaps we should change the subject."

"He started it." Madison couldn't help but bitch. She really did loathe Siri.

H.J. stepped in. "Madison, just drop it."

"But Uncle H.J., you heard what he said." Madison had called H.J. 'uncle' just as his children called Mione 'aunt'. "He's been on my back ever since I started working for him."

"That's because you don't listen." Siri had sometimes felt as if he was hitting his head against a brick wall. "And your attitude towards Muggles is appalling. Almost two-thirds of the company is made up of them."

"It doesn't change the fact that they're disgusting." Madison showed her true colors again.

Hermione now began to angry, something she rarely did. "Madison, you're a guest in my home so I suggest you refrain from being so rude about something you obviously have no idea about."

"My Father would never have allowed you to talk to..." Madison didn't get any further.

Siri was only too well aware she wasn't talking about Remus. "You're right he wouldn't. And that's because he was the same jumped-up elitist you are."

"Then he obviously had the right idea." Madison hissed at Siri as she climbed to her feet. "And if he was still here you'd be kissing my feet instead of trying to tell me how to do my job."

Siri knew the young woman had no idea how close she was to the truth. "You don't deserve the job you do hold. You've got no people skills, no-one likes you, you're opinionated, and it's usually wrong. And I can genuinely say that I hope Mione and Lucy skip a generation and hand over the company to Nathaniel Junior, because I'd rather see it in his hands than yours." Within a few days of being born, Nathaniel Junior had been tested on the Magus Scale, and unlike his father, was proving to be magically well endowed.

Madison stuck her nose in the air. "My Father made me his heir, and..."

Siri interrupted before she could say anything else. "And if he'd been alive, I'm sure he'd have been very proud of what you've become. But thankfully he isn't."

"Siri, I think that's enough." H.J. bit out. He didn't like Madison either, but Siri's animosity towards the girl was going through the roof.

"I'm sorry, Uncle H.J. but it's time someone told her what her precious father was really like." Siri snapped back.

Madison started to tell Siri exactly what she believed her father had been. "My Father..."

"...was the biggest piece of shit to walk on this world." Siri's temper was easily frayed, and it was showing.

"You don't know anything about him." Madison defended Thomas.

"You think?" Siri marched around the table. "Do you know why my Dad had a scar across his throat and he rasped when he talked?"

H.J. also rose to his feet. "Siri, this has gone far enough. Shut up before you say something you regret."

"Something I regret?" Siri laughed bitterly. "I regret that Dad ever had the misfortune to meet her father. Because of him, Uncle James lost Harry, you're crippled for life, and Dad is dead."

Madison's eyes flashed. "You can't blame my father for all of that."

"I can blame your father because it's his fucking fault." Siri's eyes flashed as well. "And he's also the reason that Aunt Hermione and Uncle H.J. lost their daughter."

In tears Hermione fled from the room.

H.J. got to his feet. "I don't know what your problem is with each other but I suggest you sort it out before I feel the need to pull out my wand and kill both of you."

Madison turned on Siri as H.J. left in search of his wife. "Look at what you did."

"What I did?" Siri's leant on the table. "I'm not the one whose father was a murdering bastard who cost two good people their daughter."

"My Father was not a murdering bastard." Madison screamed at Siri. "And he would never have hurt anyone, but if he did do that, then I'm sure they deserved it."

"You would say that, wouldn't you? And I suppose you'd think that wasn't such a big deal if Muggles died because of him, seeing as you think that Muggles are so disgusting. I'm sure you and Daddy would have had a great time bonding over which one to get rid of next." Siri was now too far gone to care what he was saying.

Madison didn't respond, and Siri continued. "What's wrong, Madison? Nothing to say?"

Madison found her voice again. "My Father..."

Siri cut her short. "You're like a fucking broken record. My father, my father."

"You bastard." Losing her temper, Madison raised her hand to slap Siri, as she once again went to defend Thomas. "My Father was..."

Siri stopped her from slapping him by grabbing her upper arms, and roughly shaking her, so that her long black hair fell down from the bun she usually wore it in. "Your father was Dominus, Madison. Now tell me again, how he'd never hurt anyone."

"You're lying." Madison retorted. "Mum would have told me."

Siri told her the truth. "Aunt Mione didn't tell you because she was afraid of you becoming like him."

Madison still refused to believe him. "Dominus was in custody when my Father's body was discovered."

"Your father's body was never discovered; just his personal belongings. They burned his body after he was executed by use of the killing curse to make sure the bastard wouldn't come back." Siri threw Thomas' manner of death in Madison's face. "And I should know. Dad was one of the people who witnessed it, along with Uncle James and Lucy Potter."

"Why are you saying this?" Madison stared in disbelief at Siri. "It isn't true."

"Anyone who knew your father well could tell you differently." Siri's anger had now turned into cold indifference.

"It's not true." Madison repeated. "And I'm leaving."

Siri pulled out his wand. "I swear on my life and my magic that Thomas Seville was Dominus."

As the white light dissipated and Siri was still standing there panting from the pain, Madison could do nothing but stare, her voice coming out in a quiet disbelieving whisper. "Mum would have told me. She would have told me."

H.J. had come back into the room just in time to witness the end of the quarrel. "Oh Merlin."

Siri could see from the girl's face that he'd gone too far. "Madison..."

H.J. turned on Siri as he put an arm around the white and dumbfounded young woman. "You stupid bastard."

Madison started to cry, and Siri felt guilt wash over him at the sound of the harsh sobs. "Give her to me."

"Are you mad if you think I'd let her anywhere near you?" H.J. started rubbing the girl's back.

"I've fucked up." Siri reached out and tugged lightly, Madison releasing her hold on H.J. "I'll deal with this."

Without remembering how she got there, Madison found herself upstairs in a bedroom, and being cradled against Siri's chest. She wanted to scream out that it wasn't true but she knew that oaths didn't lie. She found her stomach suddenly reacting as her mother's did when she was upset. "Going to be sick."

Siri pushed her into the bathroom, holding her hair up as Madison lost her dinner, tears still streaming down her cheeks as she continued to cry at the same time.

After cleaning her up, Siri found her a pair of his pajamas and helped her into them as she stood crying. He then tucked her into his bed, lying on the blankets next to her as she continued to cry into his chest.

Downstairs H.J. was fuming. "Of all the bloody irresponsible and stupid things to do. Just because he hates her and Thomas it didn't give him the right to do that. I'm going up there."

Over her shock, Hermione shook her head. "Don't. Siri's right. It's his mess. It's not as if he's a kid anymore. He can sort it."

"But he'll crucify her." H.J. pointed out.

"No, he won't." Hermione blew her nose. "He's in love with her."

H.J. couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Were you at the same dinner table I was?"

"Trust me. He's in love with her." Hermione threw the used tissue into the waste bin. "And it isn't really her he's angry with. It's himself."

H.J. still wasn't buying it. "I just don't see it."

"Siri quite rightly blames Thomas for Sirius' death, for hurting you and for killing Harry Potter." Hermione explained her hypothesis. "And to find himself in love with Thomas' daughter while he's engaged to Barb is ripping him apart. And I think he only got engaged to Barb because Madison became engaged to Malfoy. He can't admit that to himself, so instead he's convinced himself he hates Madison."

"And don't tell me she feels the same way?" H.J.'s tone was disparaging.

"No, she doesn't." Hermione had just thought Madison was, as everyone had tried to tell her, a stuck-up brat. "And I'm afraid if she ever discovers how Siri feels she'll tear him apart just as he's done to her today."

H.J. sighed. "I should have known that this dinner was going to end in disaster."

Hermione put her arms around his waist. "I'm just glad that Molly was at Luna's place."

"Me too." H.J. kissed Hermione's head. "Do you want to go out and get some dinner?"

Hermione glanced at the dinner that had been left. "Yes, and a hotel room far away from here."

H.J. promptly vanished them both.

The Next Morning

Madison woke up to find a very warm and bare chest under her head. "Damien?"

Siri came awake immediately at the sound of Madison's voice. "It's Siri."

Suddenly the memory of the previous night came back, and Madison groaned, her head hurting and her eyes feeling puffy as she'd ended up crying herself to sleep. "I thought I'd dreamt it."

Siri wasn't surprised when she pulled away. "Madison, for what's it worth, I'm sorry. How I told you was callous and totally uncalled for."

"Why didn't Mum or Lucy tell me?" Madison asked quietly, her voice a fragment of its usual volume.

"They didn't want you to think ill of your father." Siri knew that he'd screwed that up now.

"But they let me defend him knowing what he was." Madison felt cold inside. "How could they?"

Siri didn't want this to rebound on Mione or Lucy. "You adored him. You were only ten when he died, and they couldn't bring themselves to add to the grief you were already experiencing."

Madison could still remember the day Mione had turned up, and had gently explained that Thomas wasn't come back. She'd blown out every window in the property on the Island, called Mione a liar, and locked herself in room. After she'd seen a newspaper report declaring Thomas was dead, Maddie had refused to eat for days. It had been Lucy and not Mione who'd eventually gotten her to do so. "I thought he loved me but he couldn't have."

"No matter what he was, he loved you." Siri reassured her. "And even though he loved your brother and your sister, you were his favorite and he'd have done anything for you, just as he did for Harriet Potter." Siri had once overheard a conversation between his parents, and upon questioning his father, Sirius had been totally open with his son about Thomas.

"I don't understand. What did he do for Harriet?" Madison had no idea what Siri was talking about, because although Lucy had been open with her daughter, Mione hadn't wanted Madison to find out.

Siri knew she deserved the whole truth, and told her about the day that Dominus had been caught, and why. "Uncle Harry used the daughter Thomas thought was his to entrap him. They dueled, and Thomas lost. The court case went on for months before he was finally declared guilty."

"Did they really do that to him after he was executed? Burned his body?" Madison's voice shook as she asked.

Siri wished he'd kept his mouth shut about that part. "Yes. I'm sorry, Madison."

"I don't understand." Madison wrapped her arms around her knees as she sat up in the bed. "Why did he leave me if he loved me?"

"He thought he was protecting Lucy and Harriet; it had nothing to do with leaving you." Siri could see that Madison was struggling with the truth. "Thomas did love you, Madison, just as he loved your mother."

"Did they split up because of who Dad was?" Madison didn't even notice that she'd gone back to call Thomas 'Dad' as she'd done as a child.

"Yes." Siri didn't think it would be a good idea to tell her more. "And she fell in love with Uncle Remus, and your father fell in love with Lucy."

"So what's the truth about Harriet?" Madison had been told, like everyone else, the cover story about Thomas not being able to father a child, so that Harry, who'd been a friend, had fathered her instead. "You just said that Dad thought she'd had been his, so what everyone said about Harry Potter fathering the child was just a lie?"

Siri hesitated before responding. "Madison, I'm not sure this is a good idea."

"I want to know." Madison's voice rose. "Did Dad really ask Harry Potter to father my sister?" Madison had always considered Harriet her sister, and she was closer to her than anyone else in the family, except for her mother and Nathaniel.

"No." Siri shook his head. "Lucy slept with Harry, who was one of your father's Inner Circle, because she didn't want her first time to be with Thomas. It wasn't intentional but she became pregnant."

"Oh Merlin." Madison couldn't stop shaking. "What kind of a man was he?"

"Madison." Siri put his hand on top of Madison's. "I think it's better that you just remember him as a father who loved you."

"How can I, Siri?" Madison turned hurt eyes towards him. "I worshipped someone who never existed. How could Mum and Lucy have let me?"

"They thought it best." Siri tried to put a better light on things. "Madison, your father might have not been perfect, but he did love you."

"Not been perfect?" Madison couldn't believe what she was hearing. "He was a monster, Siri. I learnt all about Dominus at Hogwarts, just as you did. He killed your brother for defending your pregnant Aunt, and he tortured Harry Potter for helping everyone to escape from Hogwarts, before he killed him. I might not know the full details but I know that much. How can you say that a man like that loved anyone?"

For this Siri had an answer. "If he hadn't have loved anyone, then he wouldn't have died. He would never have tried to save Harriet and Lucy, if he hadn't loved them."

"So love was his weakness?" Not having children of her own, Madison couldn't understand how anyone could love someone so much to give up everything for them.

"Yes." Siri told Madison more. "In Uncle H.J.'s world, he was told by Dumbledore that love was the strongest weapon of all. None of us believed it until Thomas' love for Harriet brought him down. Harriet's real father never knew though, but I believe he'd have been glad because it was his daughter that took your father down."

"Harry Potter was one of three who had been destined to kill Dominus, wasn't he?" Madison had heard about the prophecies both in school, and from Mione but she had generally been sheltered from learning much more than the history books set out.

"Yes, together with Uncle H.J. and Uncle Harry." Siri confirmed what she'd learnt at school. "But what they don't tell you in the history books is that Harry Potter became a spy because Thomas came between him and his girlfriend at the time, Cammie Sebastian."

"The girl who ran off with Regulus Black?" Madison couldn't remember Cammie at all, but she had heard the family gossip about H.J.'s daughter and Siri's Uncle.

"Yes. She turned to Regulus when your father tore Harry and Cammie apart, and Harry more or less vowed revenge on Thomas, and he got it." Siri put it in somewhat more simple terms than the truth had actually been.

Madison tried to determine where it had all begun. "So it was Harry Potter's love for Cammie that started it."

Siri shook his head. "It was Thomas' destruction of her love for Harry that started it. If Thomas had never destroyed Cammie's love, Harry would have never turned to Lucy, and Harriet would never have been born."

Madison contemplated what she'd just learnt. "So in a way, Harry Potter as well as my father died for love?"

Siri nodded. "Yes. Even though the rumor is that Harry Potter loved Lucy, I don't believe he ever got over Cammie. Like Uncle Harry believes, I think he stayed behind because he didn't want to live without Cammie. If he'd known about Harriet though, that might have changed his decision."

Madison decided at that moment she never wanted to fall in love so deeply that you'd hurt for the rest of your life. "I never want to be like that."

"Tell me about it." Siri too had been scalded by what he'd learnt as a child, and by how broken his mother had become after his father's death. And while he loved Barb, it wasn't an all-consuming passion like Faith and his father, or Harry and Cammie, had shared. He then apologized again. "Madison, I really am sorry about what I've done. I suck at obliviation but I could ask Uncle Harry to obliviate you, if you don't want to remember what I've told you."

"No. I'd rather know the truth. I idolized a man who wasn't real, and it's better this way. I just wish Mum and Lucy had told me the truth."

She threw back the covers as she made a decision. "Siri, please don't tell them I know. After what you've told me, it would obviously only bring back bad memories for them both, and, even though you believe I'm a bitch, I'm not going to do that to them."

"I'll talk to Uncle H.J. and Aunt Hermione and ask them not to mention anything." Siri knew he'd have some damage control to do.

Madison shook her head. "I'll tell them. I need to apologize for ruining their dinner."

Siri could see that the truth had already had some effect on Madison, as he knew she'd never have considered anyone else's feelings before last night. "I'll apologize to them later as well. But I know they're not here right now. I checked while you were sleeping."

Madison stepped away from the bed. "Siri, I need to know the whole truth about my father, and you obviously know about him. Will you tell me about him?"

"You're sure?" Siri checked. "You won't like what you'll learn."

Madison was totally sure. "I have to know the truth."

Siri reached over to the side, and grabbed his cell phone which was also a PDA. "I was supposed to be moving to the Los Angeles office next month for a three month stint. Your mother has already asked if I can bring it forward and Lucy said that you're to finish up the San Francisco office alone."

"But you said I was doing everything wrong." Madison pointed out one of the many things Siri had said to her the previous day.

"You are." Siri then found himself apologizing yet again. "But it's my fault. I haven't been as helpful as I could have been. Especially as I have more hands-on experience in the business than you, having been apprenticed to Uncle Remus since I left school."

Madison winced as she thought about how she had tried to throw her weight around. "I don't blame you for not helping me. I've been an absolute bitch."

"I'm afraid I'm not going to argue with you." Siri had to agree with her, before smiling to soften the blow. "I was planning to rent an apartment in Monterey or Santa Barbara for the month. I'll rent one for you as well and we can talk all you want about your father."

"Thank you." Madison hesitated. "And I'm sorry about my comments about Barb. I hope that the two of you will be happy together." She then headed out of the room, her soiled clothes in her arms, finding H.J. and Hermione had just arrived back. After apologizing and obtaining a promise from them not to say anything to Mione, Lucy or Remus, she left the stunned couple behind.

Over the next month, Siri was as good as his word. He rented two apartments, and after they'd both finished work at their respective offices, he'd taken time to tell Madison whatever she wanted to know about Thomas. And it was Siri who comforted her when she cried in the night after apparating into his apartment from hers, and it was Siri who praised her when she made a discernible effort to change. He'd also been the one to comfort her when she'd broken things off with Damien, after finding him in bed with someone else. And it was Siri who had recommended to Mione that Madison continue to work under him for the time being.

February 20th 2032

"Siri?" Madison was lying with her head on his lap as he did the crossword.

"Yes?" Siri had gotten used to Madison using him as a cushion, now that their animosity had turned to friendship.

"Why do you think things in Mum's world mirrored this world so closely?" Even though Mione had been open about where she'd come from, it was Siri that had shown Madison his own memories of how he'd learnt about Mione, H.J. and Harry.

"I don't know." Siri shrugged. "Neither does anyone else."

The two of them fell silent, just the scratching of Siri's pen on the paper breaking the peace until Madison spoke again. "Did Mum tell you that she and Uncle Remus are thinking of adopting again?"

"Yes." Siri had talked to the couple the last time they'd been in town. "Now that Bella is married, and Sophia has finally got her own place, I think they miss the noise, especially as Logan is at University now."

"Is that what you'll do?" Madison knew that Siri was unable to have sons, having the same genetic defect that Sirius did. It was something that Siri had told only his fiancée and Madison, not yet able to bring himself to tell his family. "Adopt?"

"I've never thought about it." Siri filled in the last clue on the puzzle. "Even though I'm head of the Black family now, I know I can't have sons, so the estate will pass to my cousin, as an adopted son still can't inherit under the law in England, as they can in Australia."

"Oh." Madison rolled upright, and changed the subject. "Do you want a glass of wine?"

"Juice." Siri preferred it to alcohol.

Madison shuddered. "Do you drink juice when you go out on a date?"

"No." Siri got up when Madison didn't move and poured out a glass of wine for her. "I drink water."

"You drank wine at that dinner we had at Aunt Hermione's house." Madison pointed out.

"That's because you were driving me to distraction." Siri admitted.

Madison laughed. "I was revolting, wasn't I?"

"Yes." Siri changed his mind and poured himself a glass of wine as well. "Here."

"Thanks." Madison picked up Siri's discarded newspaper, a piece about the latest Boeing aircraft facing her. "I was always too afraid to fly after breaking my arm when I first tried flying." She took a sip of her wine. "Will you take me up?"

"You own several aircraft." Siri reminded her.

Madison shook her head. "I meant on a broom. I know you weren't interested in the quidditch team but I've seen you fly, and you're pretty good."

Siri put down his wine glass and held out his hand. "Let's go then."

"Now?" Fear assailed Madison.

"Now." Siri tugged her into his bedroom, grabbed his broom out of the closet and they vanished.

"I can't do this." Madison was already white.

"Yes, you can." Siri mounted his broom, cast a notice me not spell, and pulled her in front of him. "Close your eyes."

Madison had already done so. When she opened them again they were high above the ground, and she found her fear fading away as they flew above the buildings. "It's beautiful."

"Would you like some fun?" Siri hadn't flown in a while and he felt the usual buzz he got from it beginning to pervade his body.

"Okay." Madison gave a tiny scream as Siri tipped the broom towards the ground until they were skimming above the bay and heading towards Alcatraz.

Siri smiled when he heard Madison give a whoop as they avoided a boat, banking sharply to the left, before straightening up again. "I take it you like flying."

"It's wonderful." Madison grinned at Siri as she looked back.

"Hold on tight." Siri warned, as he tightened his grip on the broom and around Madison's waist.

Madison gave a loud yelp as Siri looped over, before bringing them upright again. "Do it again."

Siri did as she asked before turning towards the city as raindrops began to fall. "I think we're going to get wet."

"I don't care." Madison didn't think she'd ever felt so alive as the rain began to fall heavily on her upturned face.

Siri set them down in Golden Gate Park, and they then apparated back to Madison's apartment. "So you enjoyed it?"

Madison's eyes were sparkling. "I've never felt anything like it."

"I think you should get into something dry." Siri noticed that despite her excitement, Madison was starting to shiver.

Madison hesitated, her hand on Siri's arm. "Siri, thank you."

"It was only a broom flight." Siri countered.

"I meant for everything." Madison kissed his cheek, before heading into her bathroom to strip off her wet clothes and get changed.

Siri touched his cheek, before apparating back to his own apartment to do the same.

June 20th 2032

Siri decided to continue to base himself in the apartment while he surveyed the entire West Coast region, asking Mione to extend Madison's time with him yet again. Ecstatic at the change she was already seeing in her daughter, Mione readily agreed to allow Madison to spend six more months working in conjunction with Siri.

As time had gone by, Siri had taught Madison how to fly her own broom, and now they were both above San Francisco again. Turing

towards Alcatraz, Madison laughed out loud as she started to fall towards the ground. She barely heard Siri's worried yell to pull up. It was only as she realized that the ground was coming up far quicker than she'd anticipated that she knew the landing was going to hurt.

Suddenly she found herself flying backwards and catapulting into Siri as they both fell to the ground, Siri taking the brunt of the fall. As she lay laughing on top of him, he held her by the arms. "You stupid little fool. You could have killed yourself."

Madison's exhilarated laughter died away. "You caught me."

"Do you know how high we fell from?" Siri snapped. "It was at least thirty feet. If I hadn't cast a cushioning charm before we hit, we could have broken our backs or worse."

The adrenalin rush over, Madison began to shake. "I'm sorry."

Siri let go of her arms and wrapped his own arms around her, as she dropped her head onto his shoulder. "I shouldn't have shouted at you but you scared to me death."

Madison could also feel Siri shaking and she lifted her head. "I really did scare you, didn't I?"

"Your Mum would have killed me if anything had happened to you." Siri had promised Mione to take care of Madison, not that he really thought she needed it.

"Nothing was going to happen to me with you here." Madison turned her head and did what she'd wanted to do ever since the first night Siri had taken her flying, and kissed him.

Taken by surprise, Siri responded to the warm lips until he remembered who it was he was kissing. Lifting her off him, he shook his head. "We can't do this."

Madison stood up. "Why not?"

"Because I'm engaged to Barb." Siri reminded Madison, as he too climbed to his feet.

"Do you love her?" After having dinner with the couple on several occasions, Madison had decided that the relationship between the two of them was lukewarm at best, at least on Siri's side.

"I thought I did, but now I don't know." Siri didn't look at Madison as he picked up both brooms. "But it still doesn't make it right for me to cheat on her."

"Then end it." Madison suggested. "You know she won't make you happy."

"I can't do that to her." Siri passed Madison her broom. "I'll see you in the office on Monday."

December 4th 2032 – Miami Office

Madison was in a cubicle in the restroom when she overheard a conversation between two women from the office. "Did you hear that Siri Black dumped Barb?"

"What?" Madison recognized the voice as that of Jenny Applegate, one of the other receptionists.

"He told her that he was sorry but he didn't feel the same way about her anymore." The other woman, a Janet Smith, who worked in invoicing, filled Jenny in. "She's absolutely broken up about it. It's why she didn't come into work today."

"Poor thing." Jenny said sympathetically. "At least he had the decency to tell her, and she didn't have to come home to find him in bed with someone else like I did."

"Not everyone is like Gary." Janet informed her friend. "Do you think Black might be looking for a little company now?"

"Janet!" Jenny berated her friend. "He's only just split up with Barb."

"No harm in wondering." Janet was totally unperturbed by her friend's remark. "He is rather dishy."

"And he's just split up with his girlfriend." Jenny shook her head. "Come on. We'll miss the bus to the bar otherwise."

As the two women left, Madison unlocked the cubicle, washed her hands, and then made her way to Siri's office, closing the door behind her. He was on the phone and she waited until he'd finished. "You finished with her then."

"Bad news travels fast." Siri got up. "Yes, I did. I didn't think it right to lie to her about my feelings, or non-existent feelings, so I ended it. How did you find out?"

"I overheard two of her friends talking about in the restroom." Madison went red. "I didn't mean to listen but I could hardly leave the cubicle."

"Anyway, it's over, and I'm going home." Siri picked up his briefcase. "I'll see you on Monday."

"Aren't you going out with everyone for a drink tonight?" Madison knew that, unlike her, Siri usually met his co-workers for a drink on a Friday night.

"I don't think it's a good idea." Siri told her. "Not after I've just finished with Barb. She might be there, and it wouldn't be fair. Goodnight, Madison."

Madison let Siri leave, and she apparated out, and to the Island. "Mum, are you here?"

Mione came hurrying out, a smile on her face. "Mads, what are you doing here?"

"Can't a girl come home just to say hello?" Madison hugged her mother.

"If it was Emily or Sophia saying that, then I might believe them, but not you." Mione put her arm around Madison and led them out to the balcony. "Remus isn't here. He's still stuck in Venezuela on the Patril deal."

"That's probably better." Madison gave her order for a drink to the house elf that dutifully appeared. "Mum, I need to talk to you about Dad."

"Thomas?" Madison, unlike her siblings, never called Remus 'Dad' and had stuck to calling him 'Uncle Remus'.

"Yes." Madison took her drink. "Why didn't you ever tell me who he really was?"

"What do you mean?" Mione hoped that Madison didn't mean what she thought she meant.

"I know he was Dominus and what he did to you and everyone else." Madison had intended to keep quiet but it had been eating away at her for months.

"Oh Merlin." Mione shakily put down her drink. "Who told you?"

"Siri Black." Madison, like her father, rarely lied. "We had a massive argument at the start of the year, and he lost his temper with me, and told me."

"He had no right to do that." Mione was angry with Siri.

"He had every right, Mum." Madison defended Siri's actions. "Dad killed his brother, and because of him, his father died as well. I just wish you'd told me yourself."

"I couldn't do it to you." Mione took Madison's hands. "You were just a child, and in pain, and I was afraid what it would do to you."

"Are you sure you weren't afraid of me?" Madison challenged Mione's statement. "I'm not exactly on the lower end of the power scale, am I?"

"No, you're not." Mione acknowledged Madison's power as she was, as she and Thomas had both suspected she would be, even more powerful than Thomas had been. "And it wasn't that I was afraid of you hurting me, but of what you'd do to others. And as you grew up, I became more afraid of that."

"I was becoming just like Dad, wasn't I?" Madison knew only too well that her attitude towards Muggles and half-bloods had been like her father's. "And you were afraid that if I knew, I'd turn to the Dark Arts and strive to become as he was."

"Yes." Mione felt ashamed to admit it.

"Mum, it's okay." Madison knelt down at her mother's feet. "I never gave you any reason to think that I'd turn out any differently than that. I was bloody awful at school, and until recently I didn't think about anyone but myself. And I'm so very sorry." Madison looked up at her mother. "Mum, I love you."

"I love you too, baby." Mione hauled Madison into her arms. "I always have done, and so does Remus."

"I've been vile to him, Mum." Madison admitted. "I'm surprised he didn't ask that you drop me out of one of the aircraft halfway across the ocean."

Mione laughed. "He'd never do that. He never gave up hoping that you'd change, and he loves you as much as he loves all of his children."

"I certainly don't deserve it." Madison stood up. "Can I stay here tonight?"

"You know you can." Mione knew there was more to her daughter's visit than just confronting her about Thomas. "So what else is wrong?"

"It's Siri." Madison admitted what was bothering her, and she told her mother about the flight over San Francisco six months' earlier with

Siri, and that she'd kissed him. "I feel guilty about what's happened to him and Barb, even now."

"Are you in love with him?" Mione asked the obvious question.

"No." Madison shook her head. "But I am attracted to him, and I feel bad that he's broken things off with Barb."

"If he'd truly loved her, then one kiss wouldn't have made the slightest bit of difference, and as you've just pointed out, that was six months ago." Mione reassured her daughter. "At the most, all that it might have done was to make Siri examine his feelings for Barb. Do you think he likes you?"

"No. We're friends, sort of." Madison had never before thought about the relationship she and Siri had. "But as for more, I don't see it. I think I'm a little too aggressive for him, and there's also the stumbling block of Dad."

"You think that he resents you because of Thomas?" Mione questioned Madison's statement.

"Yes, to be honest." Madison stopped outside of her room, which had once been Thomas', Mione and Remus sleeping in the room that had been Mione's. "What do you think I should do?"

"Just be there for him if he needs a friend." Mione suggested. "Not unless you think there could be more between you."

"I don't." Madison kissed Mione's cheek. "I'm going to get showered and changed; I'll see you outside for dinner. It's too nice to eat indoors, and I'm going to make the most of the unseasonably hot weather."

Mione walked off, her mind going over what Madison had told her.

April 15th 2033

Madison stretched as she finished putting her final recommendations down. "Siri, that's about it. Have you finished?"

"Yes." Siri closed the folder on the section he was working on. "Do you want to get a drink?"

"Are you asking me out on date?" Madison teased him.

"I'd rather date a one-legged donkey." Siri grinned at her. "Everyone else is going down to the Waterfront, and I thought that perhaps little Miss High and Mighty might take the stick from up her arse and join us."

Madison knew that she'd have had a hissy fit months earlier at such a statement, instead she just grinned. "Well, Mr. Know It All, Miss H&M would be delighted to join you all." She giggled. "Can you just see everyone's faces when I walk in with you?"

"That's why I asked." Siri liked to shake things up.

"Hold on." Madison hesitated. "Will be Barb be there?"

"She's moved on." Siri wasn't surprised that Madison didn't know. "She said that she's tried, but she can't work in the same place I do." Siri had transferred to Miami to begin his review of the Southern section of the US, Madison moving with him as she was now his assistant on a permanent basis, until Mione felt that she could take over Siri's position, when Siri would then also move up the executive ladder.

"I'm sorry." Madison felt the need to apologize.

"I recommended her to another corporate firm, and she starts on Monday." Siri had done everything he could to make Barb's transition out of the company a lot easier. "So don't feel too bad, and besides, I'm the one who finished things with her. You certainly don't need to avoid her." Siri shed his tie and jacket, and picked up his wallet. "Come on, let's go get that drink."

As Madison had predicted, most of the staff almost had a cardiac arrest when they saw her walk in with Siri. She also didn't need a crystal ball to predict that the office would be buzzing with gossip that

she was seeing Siri, something she knew was true when her PA, Darlene, cornered her in the ladies. "Are you seeing Siri Black, Madison?"

"No, Dar." Madison had hired Darlene because she was one of the few people who had never been cowed by her. "I've been working with him for months now, and he's my boss. And he kept telling me that I should come down and have a drink with everyone, so I finally agreed to it."

"Just asking." Darlene headed out, and when Madison followed, she spotted her PA saying something to a tall, blond man, who subsequently headed her way.

"Can I buy you a drink?" The man asked.

Madison was about to say no, when she changed her mind. "I'll have a white wine, thank you." She held out her hand. "I'm Madison Seville."

"Everyone knows who you are." The man shook the proffered hand. "I'm Lewis Carter, and work in acquisitions."

"Well hello, Lewis." Madison followed him to a seat where the two spent the rest of the night talking. She glanced behind her when she felt a hand on her shoulder. "Hi, Siri."

"I'm thinking of leaving. Will you be alright on your own?" Siri had no intention of leaving Madison alone, despite his words.

"Actually, I'll come with you." Madison stood up, and held out her hand. "It was nice meeting you, Lewis."

Lewis glanced at Siri, before asking her a question. "I'd like to see you again. Are you free for dinner tomorrow?"

"I'm afraid not." Madison apologized. "I'm having dinner with my parents and Siri, but I'm free next Friday."

"I'll let your PA know the time." Lewis leaned forward and kissed Madison's cheek. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight." Madison followed Siri out until they found a quiet street, and they apparated out to the Island, where Siri was staying with her and her parents for a few days. "So what do you know about Lewis?" Madison asked as they walked into the sitting room.

"He's a nice guy." Siri had had drinks with him down at the bar a few times before. "Why?"

"I would have thought that that was obvious." Madison followed Siri towards the drink tray. "It's been three weeks since I split up with Robert, and I'm looking for a replacement."

Siri poured them both a glass of white wine. "At least Robert had a backbone. I think you'd eat Lewis alive."

"What makes you say that?" Madison took her glass of wine.

"He had to get your PA to check out the lay of the land." Siri started to head towards the doors to the verandah. "If he'd had any bottle, he'd have asked you yourself if you were seeing me."

"True." Madison followed Siri outside. "But he's a nice guy."

"And I still think you'd eat him alive." Siri made his way to the edge of the decking, where the wooden fence surrounded it.

Madison raised an eyebrow at his repeated statement. "That's hardly a compliment."

"Probably not, but it's the truth." Siri suddenly realized that he hadn't seen the house's other occupants. "Where are Aunt Mione and Uncle Remus?"

"I should think they're in bed." Mione glanced at her wristwatch, struggling to see the hands in the dim light. "It's gone midnight."

"I hadn't noticed it was that late." Siri turned to look out over the bannister and into the dark. "I love it out here; the way I can hear the waves crash onto the beach, even though I can't see them."

"I've always loved it here." Madison leant against the balustrade, and got back onto the subject of Lewis. "So if you think I'd eat Lewis alive, who could you recommend at the office as Robert's replacement?"

"There's always me." Siri suggested, only half-joking.

"Not afraid I'd eat you alive?" Madison teased in return.

"Not in a bad way." Siri twisted Madison's hair between his fingers. "Not unless you wanted it to be."

"Let's see shall we." Maddie decided to call Siri's bluff, and she put down her glass and dropped to her knees.

"What the hell are you doing?" Siri asked as Maddie unzipped his trousers.

"What do you think I'm doing?" Maddie asked him. "Or do you need me to draw you a diagram first?"

"No, but with your parents inside, somewhere a little more private might be a good idea." Siri suddenly found himself on the beach, his back against a rock, and he couldn't help but wonder how Mione would feel if she knew how sexually experienced her daughter was, as Madison thankfully didn't bother with the diagram, and instead used her mouth to drive all coherent thought out of Siri's mind.

The thought re-entered Siri's mind again several hours later as he lowered Madison to the sand, and she smiled at him. "I've never had anyone be able to hold me up like that before, not even Damien."

"That's probably because I make use of the company's gym, and I don't spend all of my spare time in the bar or in bed like your ex." Siri informed her. "But even my legs ache."

"It shows that you worked hard." Madison thought that Siri looked a little stunned. "You knew I was attracted to you, didn't you?"

"Yes." Siri felt the same; deep down he knew that it was one of the reasons he'd finished with Barb. "So what is this? I'm not exactly looking for a long term relationship right now. Hell, I was only half joking when I said I was interested."

"I know. So why don't we just say that we had a good time, and leave it at that?" Madison suggested.

"So tonight was just about sex?" Siri asked in a stunned voice.

"Siri, it's the 2030s, not the 1930s." Madison smirked. "Do you think that because I split up with Damien, that I don't have sex anymore, and that my relationships were purely platonic?"

"No, but I also didn't expect you to be so casual about it." Siri responded.

"What did you expect?" Madison questioned him. "That I'd tell you I loved you because we just had sex?"

"Hardly." Siri refuted her comment. "I'm not even sure that you like me."

"I like you." Madison informed him. "But then again, I like a lot of people."

Siri had never seen this side of Madison before. "Exactly how much have you had to drink tonight?"

"More than one, less than four." Madison grinned as she pulled her dress back on. "I'm not drunk; this is who I am, Siri. I like sex, and I like you. You more or less offered, so why should I turn it down?"

"So what happens now?" Siri, for once in his life, was more than a little at a loss on how to deal with the situation.

"Well, you can join me in my shower, or you can go back to your room." Madison picked up her shoes. "It's your choice."

"And what will you tell your parents?" Siri grabbed his shirt.

"Nothing." Madison picked up her empty wine glass. "Do you think I tell them about everyone I've slept with?"

Siri found himself in Madison's bathroom as she grabbed his hand and apparated them both. "I don't recall saying I was coming here."

"Then go." Madison wanted him to stay but she wasn't going to beg.

"I'll stay." Siri started to shed his clothes again as Madison did the same as the shower began to run. "Exactly how many men have you slept with?"

"More than one, less than twenty." Madison refused to give him an exact number. "You?"

"None." Siri smart mouthed.

"You know what I mean." Madison tested the temperature and stepped into the running water.

"More than one, less than thirty." Siri went higher than Madison, and he grabbed the soap as he stepped in beside her. "Why, is it a problem?"

"Not at all." Madison shivered as Siri began to soap her body. "But before this goes any further, I want you to know that while I like you, I'm not looking for a long term relationship, not anymore."

"What do you mean?" Siri bit down lightly on her neck, making her moan.

"Love makes you weak." Madison grabbed Siri's hand and placed it where she wanted him to touch her. "So if we're going to do this, it's just about sex."

"Suits me." Siri span Madison around, and dropped the soap to the floor, pinning her arms above her head, and slamming her against the shower wall. "It suits me down to the ground."

The next morning Siri woke Madison up with a glass of orange juice. "Your parents are up."

She groaned and pulled the pillow over her head. "Tell them I'll see them tomorrow."

"You've got twenty minutes; they're holding breakfast for you." Siri put down the orange juice. "So get up, and remember no-one forced you to have sex that last time."

"I was hardly going to say no." Madison's voice mumbled out from under the pillow. "Now go away."

Grinning, Siri left the room.

Over the next two months Siri discovered that he'd never before had a sexual partner who not only could keep up with him, but who was adventurous and not afraid to try new things. Siri found himself having sex not only in his home, but in Madison's office, in one of the meeting rooms, in a bathroom of a bar, in the changing room of a Muggle store where Madison had seen a dress she wanted to buy, and most daringly, in an elevator.

Madison straightened her skirt as the door opened on the ground floor and she smiled at the couple getting in before bursting into laughter. "I always thought you were so uptight."

"You just didn't know me that well." Siri grabbed her hand. "Are you looking forward to going to Sydney tomorrow?"

"No." Madison smirked at Siri. "No sex for two weeks is going to kill me."

"It will give me a chance to recover." Siri quipped.

"Just make sure you're ready for me." Madison pulled free, blew Siri a kiss and walked behind a tree. Hearing a tiny crack, Siri knew she'd apparated out.

Two Weeks Later

Siri's secretary had barely left the room when Madison locked the door, and climbed onto his lap before kissing him. "Did you miss me?"

"You know I did." Siri found her mouth again as he hurriedly pulled off her blouse, so that he could unhook her bra.

"Don't bother." Madison by now had finished undoing Siri's trousers and tugging up her skirt, she sank down onto him.

Siri groaned. "You're not wearing any underwear."

"What gave it away?" Madison began to use the arms of the chair to balance herself as she moved her hips. "Touch me."

Siri did as she asked, letting Madison do all the work. Madison moved her arms so that they were wrapped around Siri's neck as she began to move faster. "Yes. Oh Merlin. Don't stop that, Siri."

Siri surged forward as Madison's muscles contracted around him, and he gripped the desk as he bit his lip to stop himself from yelling.

After a few moments, Madison sat upright. "I missed that."

"The rest of the office didn't." Siri lifted Madison off him.

"There isn't a silencing spell on this office?" Madison asked in a horrified tone.

Siri shook his head. "I'm rarely in it so I don't bother to renew it."

"Oh Merlin." Madison didn't mind conjecture but she did mind the world knowing her business. "They're all going to know what we did. I can only imagine what they're going to say."

Siri enfolded Madison from behind and nuzzled her neck. "That I'm a lucky bastard."

"Don't do that." Madison's protest however was minimal as Siri turned her around, picked her up and placed her on the desk, before pushing her backwards. "Siri, you can't."

"They already know what we're doing." Siri bit lightly on Madison's neck as he slid into her. "And I need you again."

Again Madison's cries filled the room until words she hadn't intended to say slipped out as she held tightly to Siri's shirt, her back arching. "I love you."

Not wanting to hear them, Siri covered Madison's mouth with his own as he also found his own release.

As she sat up, Madison expressed regret at what she'd said. "I'm sorry. I don't know where that came from."

"So you didn't mean it?" Siri waved his wand over both of them, and their clothes rearranged themselves.

"No." Madison denied it.

Siri could see from her expression that she was being truthful. "It doesn't matter. I think we should head home and get showered."

Later that evening as Siri lay with Madison sleeping on his chest, he found himself thinking back to what she'd said. "This wasn't supposed to happen."

"What?" Madison murmured sleepily.

"Nothing." Siri, however, couldn't sleep, and spent the rest of the night looking at the ceiling.

After the minor hiccup, the couple reverted back to their usual carefree ways until Siri one day found himself boarding the aircraft

that had been bought to replace the ageing Boeing that had been decommissioned a few years earlier. A little smaller it was still opulently furnished. "I hope I enjoy this flight better than the last one."

"You don't like flying?" Madison buckled herself in. "Thank you, Geraldine."

Geraldine handed Siri the drink he'd requested before making herself scarce. After Thomas' death, she remained one of the few people who knew what had really had happened. As she'd been genuinely upset when Harry Sebastian had informed her of Thomas' death, she hadn't been questioned too vociferously; something she'd taken advantage of by keeping her nose clean and applying herself to her work. Lucy had spoken to her, and assured that Geraldine never had done anything, not even killed, her proximity to Thomas merely through her job, she'd promised to keep quiet.

As the plane took off, Siri found himself relaxing. "It must have been the stormy weather."

Madison frowned as she turned the dial on the air-conditioning. "It feels awfully warm in here."

She called for Geraldine who checked the cabin temperature. "It seems normal, Miss Seville but I'll ask an engineer to look at it when we land."

"Thank you." Madison tugged at her collar. "I wonder if I'm coming down with something."

"I thought it felt a little warm as well." Siri wasn't quite as bothered by heat and cold as Madison was though.

"Do you fancy shedding some clothing?" Madison smiled suggestively at Siri.

Siri glanced behind him. "Your parents are in that bedroom."

Mione and Remus had pulled an all-nighter and, after greeting Siri and Madison, had disappeared into the bedroom to get some sleep.

"They'll have put up a silencing charm." Madison unbuckled her seat belt and walked to the galley. "Geraldine, you're free to take a few hours break unless my parents need you. Mr. Black and I have everything we need."

"Thank you." Geraldine promptly tapped her chair, turning it into a bed, and put her feet up on it, closing her eyes as the flight to Australia was a long one.

Madison crooked her finger at Siri. "Come with me."

Siri was pulled into the bathroom, which unlike most Muggle airplane bathrooms could have been in a hotel room. "Another bathroom?"

"Well, we could do this in the aisle if you'd prefer." Madison set up a silencing charm before beginning to pull off her sweater. "Or we can save that for later."

"Later." Siri touched Madison's skin and hesitated. "You're burning up."

"Tell me something I don't know." Madison began to hungrily kiss Siri's neck, moaning in her throat as his hands covered her breasts.

Siri's alarm grew as he found that her body felt like a furnace. "Madison, something's wrong with you."

"I know. I need you." Madison began to tug feverishly at Siri's trousers, her hand sliding inside to free him. "Now."

Siri was again about to protest when Madison shut him up by kissing him, her tongue sliding in to tangle with his. No longer worrying about Madison's temperature, Siri slammed Madison against the wall as he devoured her mouth. He then picked her up and swung her onto the sink countertop before reaching up under her skirt and tearing her panties away.

Madison grabbed Siri's hand, placing it where she needed it most as they kissed. Soon it wasn't enough and Madison broke free from the kiss. "Fuck me."

Siri hardly noticed Madison's colorful language, having heard it before as he grasped her hips and filled her completely.

Madison seized the taps behind her as Siri drove into her. Keeping one hand on the tap for balance, Madison snatched Siri's hair, dragging him forward so that she could kiss him. Murmuring the same demand over and over again between the kisses, the burning inside of her grew and she strove to find freedom from it. Then, like a tidal wave, the heat seemed to grow before breaking as her body shook violently.

Siri kept going, his hips moving faster as he too sought the same relief, his mind on nothing but the need that was threatening to consume him.

Madison released the tap to hold Siri as he stiffened. "I love you."

Siri didn't let go of her straight away. "I thought you said you didn't love me."

"I don't know why I said it again." Madison pushed at Siri's hips with her hands, and he released her. "I didn't mean it."

Siri twisted Madison around so that she was facing him, as she'd turned to look in the mirror. "Then why say it?"

Madison swore as she spotted the love bite that Siri had made on her neck. "Dammit, Siri, did you have to be that rough?"

"Madison, it's just a love bite and will fade." Siri couldn't believe she was trying to ignore what she'd said. "I want to talk about what you just said."

Madison jumped down. "Siri, it was a mistake. I think I'm coming down with something as you tried to tell me, and I'm not thinking straight."

Siri wasn't sure he believed her excuse. "Madison."

"Siri, I'm not discussing it." Madison vanished her underwear before returning to the cabin.

When Remus entered the cabin, he knew immediately what had gone on. However he was confused as it soon became apparent that the two were barely speaking to each, and he began to wonder if he was wrong.

The next night, after they'd arrived in Sydney, as Remus climbed into bed with his wife, he told her what he believed had gone on. Mione curled up to him. "I thought there was something going on between the two of them. They've probably just had a minor falling out. It's not as if most couples don't argue."

"We rarely do." Remus pointed out.

"That's because I give in." Mione smiled at him. "And you know it."

"Do not." Remus pulled Mione closer. "I give in."

"Then it just shows that you know what's good for you." Mione giggled. "Or at least I hope you do."

"You're good for me." Remus kissed his wife. "Do you know how much I love you?"

"Seeing as you tell me every day." Mione responded as she usually did, kissing him back, before finishing her sentence. "Yes I do. And I love you as well."

Remus put all thoughts about the couple out of his mind, as he began to make love to his wife.

Three Days Later

Madison finished helping Harriet put on her wedding dress. "You look beautiful, Harriet."

"I'll do." Harriet had never been one for compliments. "As long as Taylor thinks I look like that, that's all that matters."

Madison snorted. "He worships the ground you walk on."

"Yeah, right." Harriet pulled a face. "Taylor is a typical Ozzie guy who loves his beer first, football second, and me third." She'd met him when she'd attended Berowra, Lucy preferring her daughter to attend a less elitist school than Hogwarts, even though James had been unhappy at her decision.

"Don't lie." Madison had seen how Taylor looked at her sister. "He knows he's lucky to find someone like you."

"I suppose he is." Harriet grinned. "And speaking of finding people, I hear that you're dating someone tall, dark and handsome, who is the complete antithesis of Malfoy."

"Not exactly." Madison grimaced. "We're just what the American Muggles would call fuck buddies."

"I don't believe that." Harriet chided.

"Right now it doesn't matter what you'd call us. We're not speaking. We had a massive argument." Madison revealed. "I stupidly told him I loved him, and more than once."

Harriet's face lit up. "See, I knew it was more than you're telling me."

"I don't know why I said it." Madison began to chew on her lip. "And if I did really feel like that, Siri has made it clear that he'll never settle down."

"Is this because he can't have sons?" Siri had come clean and told his mother, as well as everyone else a few months earlier.

"I don't know, but I think so." Madison didn't want to discuss Siri's private life without his say so.

Harriet frowned. "But Mum has a division looking into his genetic make-up, and why it happened, as well as why Aunt Faith survived Siri's birth, yet Uncle Sirius' first wife didn't survive Orion's." Harriet knew all about Orion. She'd met Katherine, his widow, a few times since she'd married a friend of Destin Simon's when her youngest daughter was four, and Katherine had subsequently moved to Paris.

"I know, Mum told me." Madison had told her mother than she was sort of seeing Siri that morning, and Mione had revealed that research had been ongoing for some time. "She thinks that Faith's strength saved her, and perhaps, if I did get together with Siri, seeing as I'm more than a little powerful, perhaps I'd survive something like that." Madison's rating on the Magus scale was well over 500.

"Siri would never let you, even if as you said, the two of you were actually together." Harriet span around at a knock at the door. "That will be Pops."

Madison kissed Harriet's cheek. "I'll round the rest of the bridesmaids up, and see you downstairs."

She greeted James, who was giving his granddaughter away, as she let him into the room, and disappeared downstairs.

Over the next few months, with Madison still refusing to discuss what had happened on the airplane, her and Siri's time together became marked by violent sexual encounters, each striving for their own release, and uncaring of the other's needs.

September 1st 2033

Madison screamed out Siri's name as her orgasm hit her. Pinned under him, she couldn't pull away, as she'd sometimes done to him after achieving her release and she mewled softly as her body began to react again. Siri continued to hold her arms above her head as he drove into her, his mouth biting down on her neck. As they came together, Madison once again said the words she believed she hadn't meant before. "I love you."

This time Siri knew they were true, and he rolled off her. "You mean it, don't you?"

"Yes." Madison just lay there as Siri tugged on his clothes. "Siri, where are you going?"

"Madison, you said that when we started this that it was just about sex." Siri could see the hurt in her face. "And that's all it is for me."

"Get out." Madison stared at Siri's implacable unfeeling face. "Just get out."

Siri left.

September 10th 2033

Madison requested a transfer to Sydney, and got one. But she'd barely been there a week when Remus contacted her by phone. "Madison, can you portkey to London? I'm at Siri's place."

Madison knew something serious must have happened for Remus to ask her to do that, and she left immediately. When she arrived she found Remus, James Potter and Harry Sebastian waiting for her. "What's wrong, Dad?" Madison had starting calling Remus 'Dad' like the rest of her siblings already did, after they'd first sat down and talked about what she'd learnt.

"As you know, Harry and I run as part of a pack together with two other werewolves." Remus explained. "Last night we had to take on six other werewolves as Siri decided he was going to take a walk in the moonlight alone."

Madison was horrified. "Why would he do that?"

"He was angry." Harry explained. "What we don't know is why."

"I told Siri I loved him just over a week ago, and he walked out on me." Madison revealed.

"Why would he do that?" Harry questioned Siri's actions.

"I think he's afraid to commit because he can't have sons." Madison explained. "And I think he's a little afraid of how much damage love can do to a person, so he's refusing to admit how he feels about me."

James frowned. "Why would he do that?"

"Because of what he found out about Dominus." Madison watched shock cross James' face. "Uncle James, I know all about Mum, Lucy, and Dominus, and that he was my real father. I also know all about your son, Harry, and Cammie Sebastian." Madison then told him what had happened at Hermione's home. "We both said that we never wanted to feel that way about someone else, that our relationship was just about sex. I kept telling myself it was that, but I love Siri. I've tried not to but I can't help how I feel."

Remus put his arm around Madison's shoulders. "I still feel bad that we never told you before. But we were afraid of what you'd do."

"I was too much like my father, wasn't I?" Madison could see that this was news to James, and she filled him in more. "Mum and Dad were afraid that, with the attitude I had towards Muggles, I'd become like him."

"Is that true?" James questioned his friend.

"Yes." Remus admitted guiltily. "Harry was right. We should have told Madison sooner."

"It doesn't matter now." Madison hugged Remus. "Good grief. I was such a bitch, wasn't I? I'm surprised you even put up with me, let alone hid the truth."

"I put up with you because I never gave up hoping you'd change, and I love you as much as I love Nat, Emily, Bella, Logan and Sophia." Remus reassured Madison, as he had done every time since they'd talked about what she'd learnt.

"I love you too, Dad." Madison kissed Remus' cheek before letting go.

Harry could see that what Mione had told him about how different Madison was now was completely true. "You're so different now; it's hard to believe you're the same girl."

"Well I am, Uncle Harry." Madison glanced around. "So is Siri here?"

"Yes." Remus nodded towards the staircase. "He wasn't bitten but he's in bad shape. If we hadn't have had Oz with us, the outcome may have been very different. He's in his bedroom."

Madison didn't stop to thank them and ran upstairs. Opening the door she was horrified at the state of Siri; he was still covered in faint bruises and scratches, some of which must have been quite deep. "Oh Merlin." Sitting down by his bed, she took his hand. "Siri?"

Sedated, Siri slept on. When he awoke he found Madison's head on the bed as she slept. "Madison?"

"Ow." Madison rubbed her neck as she sat up. "Siri, you bloody idiot."

"Hello to you too." Siri could already feel his body healing but even so, he hurt everywhere. "You're the last person I expected to see here."

"Dad called me." Madison glared at Siri. "What point were you trying to prove?"

"I wasn't trying to prove anything." Siri glared back. "I was angry and I wanted some fresh air."

"You were angry because I told you I loved you, weren't you?" Madison's tone was still heated.

"Yes." Siri sat up. "I don't want your love."

"But you've got it." Madison prodded his chest. "After what you told me about my father and Harry Potter, I didn't ever want to feel like that about anyone, but because of you, I do, and I hate it as much as you do." Madison prodded Siri with every few words. "And I know you love me."

"I do not love you." Siri ground out.

Madison refused to believe him, and pushed her finger into his chest. "Just admit it, Siri. You're in love with me."

"I don't want to be." Siri found himself screaming at her. "I don't want to be. Love destroys you, and I can't do it. I just can't do it."

Madison slipped onto the bed and cradled Siri as he began to cry. "Let it out."

Pent-up grief began to leak out as Siri sobbed against Madison's breast, her hand cradling his head. "I don't want to be in love with you."

As Siri's shaking lessened, Madison lifted his head. "Siri, I don't want to be in love with you either, but I am."

His face still wet with tears, Siri blindly found Madison's mouth, his kiss desperate. Madison pulled away. "Lie back."

Siri let Madison push him back, before she climbed off the bed, undressed and vanished his pajama bottoms. She then kissed him before gently making love to him, taking care not to irritate his wounds. As Siri lay there afterwards, he kissed Madison's forehead, and finally admitted to her how he felt about her. "I love you."

"I know." Madison smiled to herself. "I know."

January 7th 2034

Harry walked in carrying their five year old daughter, Faith. "Cass, this is your brother's wedding, and we're going to be late."

"I'm coming." Cassandra took one last look in the mirror. "Merlin, I look fat."

"You look pregnant." At 51, Cassandra and Harry had been stunned to learn that out of the blue that Cassandra had conceived naturally, and now she was seven months along, and was expecting twins,

much to Harry's delight and Cassandra's chagrin. "Now hurry up. Orion, Andra and Nia are all finally dressed, and I want to make sure they stay clean. You know what Ori's like."

"I know." Cassandra groaned. "My back is killing me. This would never have happened if I'd been a Muggle."

Unlike Muggles, witches were usually able to conceive naturally right up until they were in their sixties, their extended lifespans making it possible. Not expecting Cassandra to be able to get pregnant naturally, neither of them had worried about using a contraceptive spell, the result of which was Cassandra's late pregnancy. "But it has happened, and I, for one, couldn't be happier about it." Harry kissed his wife's cheek.

"That's because you're not carrying them." Cassandra snapped, the pregnancy taking its toll on her. "And if I go into labor at this wedding, I'll kill you for rushing me."

"If you go into labor, then we'll deal with it." Harry was used to Cassandra worrying. "Now hurry up. The car is waiting." Unwilling to risk Cassandra portkeying or apparating, just as Lucy Potter had turned to Muggle transportation when she'd been expecting Harriet so had they, going as far as to fly to Australia where the wedding was being held. Knowing how much it meant to Siri for his sister to be there, Madison had not only sent the jet to collect them, but had also arranged for a healer and midwife to travel with them just in case.

On arriving at the Sevilles' house, the same place Mione had once wed Thomas, Harry hustled his brood into an aisle, before sliding in at the end, Faith, who adored her father, sitting on his lap. He turned at a tap on his shoulder. "Katherine, I wasn't sure you'd make it. Henri said you'd been unwell."

"Just a bout of morning sickness, and I couldn't miss Siri's wedding." Like Cassandra, Katherine had been stunned to get pregnant again this late in life, and like Harry, her husband had been delighted. She smiled at Harry, and Cassandra who tried to turn around, her stomach making it difficult. "How much longer, Cassandra?"

"Four weeks tops they reckon." Cassandra arched again. "But I'd be glad if it was four minutes."

The man at Katherine's side held out his hand, his French accent heavier than Destin's had been. "Harry, it is so good to see again. You too, Cassandra."

"Henri, it's good to see you as well." Harry like the stocky Frenchman Auror who adored Katherine. "I see you brought the brood as well."

Henri Gaston smiled. "They did not wish to miss their Uncle Siri's nuptials. Especially this one." A tiny blond girl hid her face in her father's lap. "I sometimes wonder where Giselle gets her shyness from."

"I'm not shy." Katherine's six year old son, Jean, piped up in perfect English. "Am I, Maman?"

"You most certainly aren't." Katherine ruffled his hair. "And neither are your older sisters." Both Oriana and Ellie, neither of whom were married yet, were acting as bridesmaids to Madison.

Siri came dashing into the room, stopping when he saw Katherine. "The girls look lovely, as do you."

"Thanks, Siri." Katherine got to her feet and kissed Siri. "You look pretty good yourself."

"You can thank Sevvv for that." Sevvv was acting as Siri's best man. "He's got better taste than I ever will."

Katherine felt a small pang as she looked at how good Siri looked, he and Orion having shared the same dark good looks as their father. "I'm just sorry Orion and you Dad couldn't be here for this."

"So am I." Siri hugged Katherine, and not wanting to get upset, he excused himself. "I'd better get up to the front. I can't have my bride beating me to the altar."

In her room Madison was pacing anxiously, Callie and Harriet, as her maids of honor, trying to calm her down. Callie grinned at her sister-in-law. "It's just a wedding, Mads. Just say 'I do' in the right place, and hey presto, before you know it, you'll be married."

"What if he changes his mind?" Unlike at most weddings where the groom fretted over his bride turning up, it was Madison who was afraid that she'd get to the altar and Siri wouldn't be there. "What if he decides that..."

"Hush." Callie put a finger over Madison's lips. "Siri loves you, and he's here. I saw him five minutes ago when I went to check on the arrivals."

"Who else is here?" Madison picked up the bouquet her brother had designed for her.

"Everyone I think you've ever met, and probably haven't." Harriet had never seen so many people before, not even at her own wedding. "But if you're talking about the Family, then there's Katherine, Henri and the kids; Uncle Harry, Aunt Cass and their lot." Harriet's eyebrows shot up. "She looks ready to drop at any moment by the way."

Madison laughed at Harriet's bluntness; the girl a lot like her mother with her outspokenness. "Wouldn't that be a turn-up for the books?"

"I don't think Aunt Cass' waters breaking over your wedding dress would be a good look for you." Harriet then went on. "All the aunts and uncles are here; Luna, Xander and their bunch, as are H.J. and Hermione, and all of their lot. Aunt Faith, Pops, Nanna Tonks, and their three, and I could go on, but you'd never get married if I did."

Madison by now had calmed down, and she opened the door when she heard a knock. "Hi Dad."

Remus held out his arm. "You look lovely. Your Mum is going to weep buckets when she's see you."

"I saw her at Emily's wedding last month." Madison reminded Remus of his daughter's recent nuptials. "Let's go then."

The wedding went like clockwork until the reception, when Cassandra gave a wail. "I knew it. Harry, my waters just broke."

Harry handed Faith over to H.J. "Sorry, my wife needs a midwife."

Six hours later, Madison and Siri delaying their honeymoon, everyone was met in the waiting room by Harry, who, grinning widely, proudly announced that he had two new daughters, both weighing exactly 4lbs, and they'd decided to call one Maddie in honor of Madison, who promptly burst into tears, and the other one Robyn, just because they liked the name.

One Year Later

Siri hugged his mother as she flew into the waiting room. Despite being in her mid-fifties, Faith was as agile as ever. "Is she alright?"

"Both Mads and Leo are doing well." Siri assured his worried mother.

Faith flopped down onto a seat, her legs shaking. "Thank goodness."

"Tell me about it." Siri had been furious when he'd found out that Madison had cancelled the spell on him that prevented him from having sons, and had deliberately fallen pregnant, refusing to abort the baby when it had turned out to be a boy. "Terry said that she actually had quite an easy time of it. He thinks that it's because she's so powerful, and Leo put little stress on her magically, but even Madison's rating on the Magus scale dropped to below 200 because she was carrying him. And I've had the spell put back on me, and I've told her if she removes it again, I'll get a Muggle vasectomy, and there will be no more children, not even girls."

Faith smiled, but she understood why Madison had done it. "So just granddaughters to look forward to after this."

"I couldn't go through the worry again." Siri hadn't spoken to Madison for six weeks when he'd found out what she'd done until he'd found

her sobbing her heart out, and she'd admitted that was terrified, but still adamant that she was going to have the baby. Siri had then supported his wife throughout the pregnancy, before she was induced at eight months, her healer deciding it would be better to get the baby out earlier. "So yes, just girls in future." He smiled. "Not that Mads will be ready to think about that sort of thing just yet."

"Come on, take me to meet my grandson." Faith followed Siri out of the room, and down the corridor to Maddie's room, to find that she was the first person there. "Where's everyone else?"

"We wanted you to meet him first." Siri took his son out of the crib. "Mum, meet Leo Sirius Black."

Faith burst into tears as she took her grandson from him. "He's beautiful, Siri. And he looks a lot like you did when you were born."

"I've seen the photos." Siri reminded his mother. "I'll be back shortly. I think now I should tell everyone else."

Less than twenty minutes later, the room was full to bursting, Cassandra cuddling Leo, as despite have more than enough babies of her own, she hadn't been able to resist getting her hands on her nephew.

Siri took the opportunity to check on his wife. "You are never to do this again."

Madison smiled sleepily. "I don't need to. I've got everything I want." She looked around the room. "Good parents, good friends, the best family, but most importantly, my husband and my son."

Siri leaned over, and kissed her. "I love you."

"I love you too." Madison yawned. "More than I could have ever thought possible."

As her words trailed off, Siri watched his wife fall into an exhausted asleep, and as she did so, he wondered what Thomas would have

made of his new grandson if he'd still been alive. Little did he know that Thomas was in no position to care.

Next chapter: Epilogue - We go back to the moment of Thomas' execution.

Epilogue: Be Careful What You Wish For

July 13th 2013

Thomas watched Harry Sebastian slip his wand into a slot next to the glass panel in his cell, and give the authorization code to release it. "Authorization Harry Sebastian Alpha Omega Six."

As the glass panel slid down to waist height, and Harry aimed his wand at Thomas, Thomas wondered if the moment of his death had finally come. It hadn't yet; Harry's words were merely ones to bind him, and Thomas found his arms restrained behind his back. Only then did Harry lower the glass completely to the ground. Thomas' stomach knotted up as Harry read out the death sentence to him. "Thomas Seville, by order of Sirius Black, the Minister of Magic, you are hereby sentenced to death."

His heart racing, Thomas was then pushed to his knees by Harry, naturally resisting the movement but he couldn't hide the tremors that were going through him, and he knew that Harry could feel them when he spoke softly to him. "I told you you'd be afraid."

"Go fuck yourself." Thomas had no intention of admitting that he was afraid, even though that was very much the case.

Insult was added to injury as the woman who'd orchestrated his downfall threw his own words, words that he himself had uttered to Dumbledore just before he died, back in his face. "Not exactly fitting last words."

Thomas didn't respond as Harry asked whether he had anything else he wanted to say. Thomas could say nothing, terror had robbed him of his voice, fear clutching at his insides as a baby would clutch at his mother, and he stiffened slightly as he felt the tip of Harry's wand touch the back of his neck. He wanted to fight, to try and run, to weep, but fear had robbed him of motion, and he could do little but close his eyes as Harry began to incant the spell that would take his life away. Thomas' last thought was of his wife, and then everything went black.

Suddenly the darkness ended, and Thomas was almost blinded by the white light. Pale and shaken, he struggled to his feet, to find that the bindings on his arms had vanished. At the sound of gravel crunching underfoot, he spun around, and his face turned ugly. "Potter."

Harry Potter grinned at him. "Nice to see you too, Seville." Harry laughed as Thomas automatically withdrew his wand which had somehow appeared in a holster that shouldn't have been there. "My primary wand also appeared here when I did, as I believe they're linked to our souls. But seeing as we're both no longer living, I think you're going to have a problem killing a dead man with the wand you're holding in your hand."

Thomas tried a simple spell, only for it to fail and he lowered the wand. "So what is this place, and don't say Muggle heaven."

"This is the Garden of Knowledge." Harry waved his arm to encompass the grassed and wooded area, before he pointed to a font surrounded by stone benches. "And that is the Font of Truth."

"It still doesn't tell me where we are." Thomas followed Harry to the area where the stone benches were.

"It's a sort of world between worlds." Harry brought up a book written by C.S. Lewis that he'd once read. "Have you ever read 'The Magician's Nephew'?"

"Yes." Thomas had actually read all seven books of the Narnia Chronicles to Maddie. "You're telling me that this is like the Wood Between the Worlds?"

"Sort of, except for the fact that there aren't any pools, well apart from the Font, and the Forgetful River." Harry pointed in the direction of the river. "Which is over there. But this place does lead to every other world in existence; every time that is in existence; and everything that ever was."

"So why are we here?" Thomas asked the next obvious question.

"You're here to do penance, Seville." Harry sat down.

"What do you mean by penance?" Thomas decided he may as well sit down too.

"Do you know the expression 'to pay the piper'?" Harry asked, fully expecting Thomas to say yes.

"Of course I do. The exact phrase is 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'." Thomas gave Harry a lesson on the origin of the expression. "It's a Muggle phrase and dates back to the 1600s, when pipes were used as an accompaniment for dancing and the like. The lord of the castle where the piper was playing did the paying, and he therefore chose the tunes."

"Unfortunately for you, you will be paying the piper, but you won't be choosing the tunes." Harry's face became serious. "I should know. I've been through it already. I killed willingly for you, Seville, and the universe exacted a payment from me for my sins. Care to guess as to the form of payment?"

Thomas was beginning to get irritated. "Just tell me, Potter."

"I had to endure the same as my victims did, Seville." Harry revealed what had happened to him, and what was going to happen to Thomas. "I experienced their last moments on Earth; their pain, their fear, their despair. I lived every last second of their life from the moment they knew they were going to die up until when I killed them. I'm just glad I made it quick for them. Something you didn't exactly specialize in." When Thomas paled, Harry smiled but there was nothing friendly about it. "It's quite a frightening thought, isn't it? I felt the same way when I was told what I'd have to go through."

"Who told you?" Thomas asked in a quiet voice, the memory of what he'd done to Harry, and the pain he'd put him through, the one memory most uppermost in his mind.

"I did." The woman standing behind him told him, and as Thomas turned around, she introduced herself. "Hello, Thomas. I am Nyx. I believe you know of me through my daughter, Atropos."

Thomas got to his feet. "How do you know that?"

"I know everything, Thomas." Nyx sat down. "And I control everything, even your insignificant mortal lives."

Thomas could feel the raw power radiating off the woman in front of him, and he remembered Atropos' words to him about her power paling beside this woman's. "Atropos was wrong about you being able to interfere with events, wasn't she?"

"Very wrong." Nyx confirmed Thomas' words. "I'm the one who set this all up. I needed a test for my daughter, and this was it. I changed H.J.'s journey into the past, and after that you all became players in my play."

Thomas was incredulous. "What gives you the right to mess with other people's lives?"

"I'm an immortal, Thomas." Nyx reminded him. "And you should know that even other immortals fear me. I can make life, and I can take life. I can manipulate, and I can scheme. And neither you nor any other immortal can do anything to change that."

"But even you must answer to someone." Thomas challenged her. "For every action in nature there is always an equal and opposite reaction."

"You know your laws of motion." Nyx acknowledged. "And you're right. Even I have to answer to someone. In my case it's the universe. And like Harry, for every unjustified death caused because of my meddling, I too had to endure the last moments of those mortals who should not have died when they did."

"So you experienced what Potter did?" Thomas asked to make sure he'd understood her correctly.

"Yes." Nyx confirmed Thomas' suspicion. "Did you really think that because I'm immortal, I'd be any different?"

"To be frank, yes, I did." Thomas was having trouble believing what he'd heard.

"I can see you don't believe me, but it's true." Nyx continued. "And that wasn't all, to change your lives as I did, I also had to ensure a balance remained."

"That's why some events in both worlds paralleled each other, isn't it?" Thomas guessed.

"Very good." Nyx once again acknowledged that Thomas was right. "Some things, however, are still not in balance. Hence Harry's appearance here. He's done what he needs to, and now he'll move on. He still needs to find his peace."

"But what about Lucy and his daughter?" Thomas recalled the conversation with Lucy, that to him, had just taken place, even though he suspected that here time ran at a different speed. "And what of my wife?"

"Their destiny is not yours to know. But I will tell you that most of the people you knew in that world have now passed on." Nyx confirmed Thomas' suspicion that time in the Garden ran at a different rate to that of the world he'd just left.

"How long have been I held in the darkness?" Thomas questioned what had felt just like moments to him.

"It's been more than ninety years of your time since Harry Sebastian stood and uttered the killing curse." To Nyx it had been just a mere moment. "And yes, he's still alive. But even his life, which has been a long and happy one, is now drawing to a close. Unlike poor Harry's here. Because of you and me, he suffered more than he should have, and he died before his time. I am therefore giving him a second chance, a chance to live the life he should have lived."

"How?" Thomas wondered what Nyx meant by a second chance.

"He's going to be reborn, but before he moved on, he wanted to be the one to tell you what awaited you." Nyx beckoned to Harry. "Harry, it's almost time."

Harry was suddenly nervous as he sat down beside her. "Will I remember this life?"

"One day you will but not until you're ready." Nyx kissed his forehead. "Now you're prepared."

"Where are you sending me?" Harry knew he would be moving on, but not where.

"To be born to Lily and James Potter but in another world." Nyx smiled, and gently touched Harry's face. "Be well, Harry Potter."

"Be well, Nyx." Harry then faded away.

Thomas swallowed reflexively as he was left alone with the immortal. "So let's do this then."

"I wouldn't be in too much of a hurry if I was you." Nyx snapped her fingers, and a familiar figure appeared. "Hello, daughter."

Atropos went white when she saw Thomas and her mother. "Mother, please forgive me."

"You've been a very silly girl, Atropos." Nyx stood up. "And I warned you that you would have a price to pay."

"But I'm immortal." Atropos pointed out, still hoping to defer her punishment. "It's different for us."

"Not this time." Nyx denied her daughter's statement before making a demand. "And so, I want you to tell me what you desire more than anything else."

"Nothing." Atropos' voice shook.

"You're lying to me, Atropos." Nyx took her daughter's chin firmly between her fingers. "You desire to walk among mortals."

Atropos began to shake her head, as she began to understand what her punishment was going to be. "No, please no."

"In future you should be careful what you wish for." Nyx released her daughter. "Goodbye, Atropos."

Atropos screamed as she vanished.

Thomas, however, was confused. "What exactly have you done to her?"

"Given her what she wanted." Nyx sat back down. "She wished to walk among mortals. I've therefore granted Atropos' wish, albeit that she's now also a mortal herself."

Thomas couldn't see why Atropos had looked so terrified. "That isn't so bad."

Nyx had no intention of letting Atropos get off as easily as Thomas seemed to believe she was going to. "If it was just one lifetime she'd have to live, maybe not. But she's going to live one lifetime of a mortal life for every life you took since she collaborated with you. And she's going to know who she really is as she endures it, so that she knows why she's going through it. Not only that, I've also made sure that each life she will live will be one of poverty, misery, and despair, and at the end of each life she will meet with a violent end, just like the people you killed."

"And when it's over?" Thomas asked.

"Her last mortal life will be very different." Nyx smiled but it was a smile that spoke of scheming, and not kindness. "She won't remember who she is, and how she behaves will determine whether she returns here, or whether she dies a mortal, never to be reborn. However, in the last twenty-four hours of her life, her memories will return, and she will either be able to rejoice, or she will mourn the darkness she knows is coming."

"You're telling me this for a reason, aren't you?" Thomas knew that Nyx had to have a reason, even if she was only telling him what was to come purely for her own amusement.

"Yes. Before we part I want you to know what else will befall my daughter." Nyx beckoned to Thomas after rising and touching the water in the font. "Come see."

Thomas watched as a baby was passed to its mother. "Who is that?"

"That's Atropos. This is who she will become in her final life. But right now she is living far in the past, and she is working her way to this moment." Nyx touched the water again, and the image changed to show two small girls. "Do you recognize any of them?"

Thomas studied the two girls before shaking his head. "I presume one of them will be Atropos but as to whom they are, I have no idea."

"They are Petunia and Lily Evans." Nyx watched understanding blossoming on Thomas' face.

Thomas continued to watch the girls play together. "Atropos is going to become Petunia Dursley, isn't she?"

"In a manner of speaking. When she reaches this moment she will still be Petunia Evans, and I have no idea if she'll marry Dursley or not." Nyx touched the water yet again, and the image vanished. "As I am not going to interfere in this world, I don't know what will happen. I'm just going to let the universe do its job. It's entirely up to Atropos how things pan out for her."

"But you said that Harry is still going to be born to the Potters." Thomas pointed out. "So you already know what happens to them."

"I thought you'd notice that." Nyx touched the water again to show James and Lily holding hands and facing each other as they exchanged wedding vows. "There are some moments in time that are fixed, and even I can't interfere with them. James and Lily's marriage

is one of them, as are the births of Tom Riddle and Harry Potter; Hitler taking over; the 4th World War."

"Fourth?" Thomas questioned her statement.

"Yes." Nyx returned the water to its inert state. "Your race will always be at war. It's instinct, Thomas, and it's that instinct that has made you the man you are."

Thomas took a step backwards as Nyx reached out to touch him. "You're going to give me what I wished for, aren't you?"

"I am." Nyx confirmed. "An eternity. However, for you it will be an eternity of pain. When you reach the end of one cycle, you'll start again with your very first victim. Goodbye, Thomas."

Thomas had no chance even to scream as he vanished. He'd barely shimmered out of existence when Lachesis appeared. "Mother, that was a cruel punishment, even for someone like him."

"I knew you'd be watching." Nyx took her daughter's hand. "Don't tell me you wanted me to show him some mercy?"

Lachesis was rather soft-hearted. "I believe he should suffer through what those he hurt endured but it's not fair to make him go through that forever."

"Because you've made a plea on his behalf, I'll reconsider my punishment in several millennia or so." Nyx promised. "Now spit out whatever else you came here to ask me."

Lachesis set out what she was looking for. "I want you to give Mione, Harry and H.J. the same chance as you've given Harry Potter."

"I will grant your request as far as Mione is concerned." Nyx acquiesced to that part of her daughter's plea. "But Harry's and H.J.'s journeys are almost over. They are content in the world in which they still reside, and neither needs to search any further for peace."

"Then grant the same chance as you've given Harry Potter to everyone else who lost out because of you." Lachesis begged.

Nyx stroked her daughter's face. "You are my most beloved daughter, and I cannot deny you anything. But even I am limited by the laws of the universe, so I am therefore only able to grant one chance for each Pillar. Harry and Mione already constitute two Pillars. Who else would you choose?"

Lachesis told her the names of the two people she thought deserved a second chance more than anyone else, and Nyx kissed her cheek. "It is done."

Grabbing her mother before she could vanish, Lachesis had one final question for her. "Will you really let Atropos die knowing what she's lost if she doesn't prove herself?"

"Everything must come to an end; even us one day." Nyx said softly, as she contemplated her own demise. "If your sister had proven true, then she would have lived until the end of the universe, as we will before moving onto the next plane. So the answer to your question is yes; if Atropos fails me again, I will let the universe come to a premature close for her, and she will go to her grave knowing why."

Lachesis was left alone as Nyx disappeared, before she too vanished, leaving the Garden quiet except for the sounds of birds and running water.

It's finally done! The trilogy will conclude in the final part, Harry Potter and the Final Temptation. More details in my profile. However, this won't appear for at least two months, as I have another bout of major surgery to get through before I start it.